

THE
SCHEME *W-20*
AND
CONDUCT
OF
PROVIDENCE,
FROM THE
CREATION
TO THE
Coming of *MESSIAH*:

OR,
An ENQUIRY into the REASONS
of the DIVINE DISPENSATIONS
in that Period.

By Mr. *WELSTED*.

The SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N:

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To his GRACE the
Duke of *CHANDOS*.

MY LORD,



Here is, it is well known,
a piety and greatness, natural to your temper,
which must needs render
all well-meant disquisitions into sacred subjects, acceptable to you, and
the more so, the freer they are from
anger, prejudice, or any of those
narrow passions, that never had dominion in your own breast.

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This treatise, then, I am persuaded, my Lord, will meet with, at your noble hands, a reception, very different from what might be expected from those courtly philosophers, who are too unvulgar to relish any *divinity*, that is not *Pagan*, or to approve of any *orthodoxy*, whether in points of faith, or practice.

The cause of virtue, and true religion, is as much at your Grace's heart, as that of vice and immorality is the care of madmen and libertines; which makes it altogether as right, my Lord, to inscribe to you a *view of revelation*, as it would have been to inscribe to *Polycharminus* a *defence of Atheism*.

If I wanted any other, or farther justification for dedicating this Essay to your Grace, I would humbly mention the *shortness* of it, which is either the best excuse for a bad book, or the truest

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truest recommendation and glory of a good one.

There is an Evil, my Lord, *under the Sun*, which, of all others, I have most marvell'd at, I mean the length and voluminousness of the mortal Writings of some men; nor is there any thing, that a man, who loves his country, would more desire to see redress'd.

As often therefore as I think of this grievance, I cannot forbear wishing, that the laws of *gravitation* and *attraction*, which rule so irresistibly other great bodies, might take place also with respect to *books*, and that these might, in like manner, *attract*, and have dominion over one another, in proportion, not to their outward *bulk and magnitude*, but to their *solid contents*.

If this were the case, your Grace will imagine, that very new and extraordinary effects must fall out in the

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world of letters. A few enliven'd, fine-spirited paragraphs would set *libraries* in motion; here, might we see a small *manual* lording it in the center of a *Folio System*, and there an army of *Quartos* wheeling round an invifible *Twelves*: whole fhelves of *morality* would bend to little *Epictetus*, one page of *Sy---s* draw after it the labours of fynods, and a fingle ferman of *Sb---k* the divinity of a century.

It was faid by a great wit of *France*, that nation of great wits, that *to fee and enjoy, only in imagination, any defirable good, was as true a pleasure, as the actual poffeffion of it*: If this were fo, my Lord, as to the revolutions, one might *thus* paint to one's felf in the *affairs of literature*, and if *fancy* had, in truth, fuch virtue here, who but would indulge it to the utmoft! who would not take fatisfaction

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tisfaction for the injuries of wit, and the popularity of nonsense! who would not rejoice in a *vision*, that might shew him our *Sc---ts*, *Cl---ts*, *Wh---ns* in their true orbit, with ten thousand mitred theologers behind them.

There is, unquestionably, a very true and sublime pleasure, flowing from many such virtuous exercises, and plays, of the *fancy*: In solitude, my Lord, or hours of musing, I have sometimes thrown myself into your great situation and character; and while I have been ministering mercy to undeserv'd misfortune, or suffering merit, I have felt, in this imaginary scene, as high transport, as arises, perhaps, from the real ability and habit to do such things.

The disproportion is, that these are the pleasures of but a few moments, and can be but seldom re-

A 4 peated;

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peated; whereas the acts themselves of charity and bounty, and the remembrance of them, are a fixed and perpetual entertainment and delight: such, no doubt, is to your Grace, the recollection of all your beneficent deeds, and such the daily sight of those *monuments* of piety, that have distinguish'd your excellent life, and which, in a better age, would have done honour to *poets* and *historians*, and rais'd the reputation of their *arts*.

Those *arts* were indeed meant, and were once able, to give immortality to *heroes*; but when such *prostitution* is made of them, as we have seen in our days, the truly *great* and *good* had better lie out of their notice, and trust their characters, as you may safely do yours, my Lord, to that faithful *tradition*, which the memory of great benefactions, and gratitude
for

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for them, will keep up and extend through successive generations.

This *oral* chronicle, or register of virtue, is, in my partial judgment, as good a security to it, as the pyramids of marble, and will last, perhaps, as long as the histories of Mr. *H-gg--ns*. Your Grace, 'tis certain, needs no unnatural aids to convey your great name to future ages; its own intrinsic beauty and splendor will carry it through all time, as the *Eagle* is borne up to the sun by his native strength and velocity.

The late Master of the *Charter-house*, as I remember, in a preface to one of his works, has something to this effect — *I did not at first expect*, says the Doctor, *that my book would have come to such a length* ----- then adds ----- *Sed mihi scribenti succrevit materia*---

The

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The same thing, my Lord, seems in some sort to have befallen me ; I have already stretch'd this address to a number of pages, without designing, or so much as perceiving it. Nevertheless, your Grace, I hope, will not be quite out of patience ; for this desultory and careless way of speaking, as it deserves, so asks little attention ; 'tis what one may bear with in any temper, even when the mind is most inactive, and most desirous to be relieved from thought.

There is an art of conversing with great men, which sometimes happily enough amuses them, at the same time that they are too knowing to be instructed, and too delicate to be easily pleased : the thing, that comes nearest to this, in *written discourse*, is what we call *Rhapsody*, a species of wit, conceiv'd

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ceiv'd of but by few, but which, if I mistake not, would yield to no other, if it could be skilfully touch'd. An author, my Lord, of your own *noble order*, and a lady among the *Quakers*, have bid fair for success in this way: for my own part, far from presuming to follow these bright adventurers, I have only shifted from one thing to another in such manner, as might give me a chance to be less tiresome, and that I might not, like some *modern apologists*, dream on in one uniform prolixity.

Your Grace is now come within sight of the treatise itself, for which I have presumed to request your safeguard and passport through a divided, jealous world. — The introduction to this work, my Lord, which is all I need say farther of it, will

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will at once acquaint you with what *view* it was written, and on what *principles* it has been conducted; both of which, I am very certain, cannot fail of your Grace's approbation.

I am,

MY LORD,

Your Grace's most obedient

and most humble servant,

Leonard Welsted.



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T H E



THE
SCHEME and CONDUCT
OF
PROVIDENCE.

INTRODUCTION.



O one, 'tis certain, has a right to the attention of the public, on any debate or enquiry, unless he can pursue that enquiry to better purpose, in some sense or other, than has been done before; unless he can open some field of thought, not yet discovered, and lay before men truths, either not known to them, or not known, as they

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should

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should be. If he can do this, it is highly commendable in him to write, and in some situations may be his duty ; if he cannot, he had better let it alone ; better far than write merely for ambition, or for vanity, and to shew the reasons he may have to admire himself.

The number of books, already publish'd in all languages, is such, that it is more than the labour of a man's life to know the titles and drift of but a few of them ; and it is not, perhaps, worth a wise man's while to read one in a thousand of those few : Who then would add to this yoke and distress of letters, if with reason or with conscience he could decline it ? For my own part, nothing, I am persuaded, could have mov'd me to tax the public even with these few pages, if the design and argument of the discourse had not been, in a great degree, new and untouch'd, and if it did not tend throughout to account for things, which have not, that I know of, been accounted for, or not fully, by other writers.

Many

Many things, no doubt, have not been so explain'd as to put an end to contention ; and many have been treated in a way, that serv'd only to encourage it. The difficulty, in particular, of the second commandment, or the objection arising from G o d's visiting the sins of the fathers on the children, has been managed with a weakness or disingenuity, that I am concern'd to mention, and that by almost all authors, that ever meddled with it: The opposition therefore, form'd on this bottom, against *Moses* and his laws, has hitherto stood, as it was, and 'tis plain, might be carried on very triumphantly, if no other resource were to be had in the matter.

It was this consideration, that first suggested to me the thoughts of this treatise: Afterwards I enlarg'd my plan, and took in whatever seem'd most material to the defence, in general, of this branch of revelation: The volume, nevertheless, did not not swell to an immoderate size ; nor need the sight of it disturb the most indolent curious man in the world : very little time or trouble will

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serve to peruse a piece, which is lengthened neither by invective nor declamation, which is not loaded with superfluous erudition, nor cramm'd with quotations, to spoil the the eyes of learned readers, and to be stared at by ignorant ones.

I will only add, that I should be sorry to have said any thing, which might give offence to pious and well-meaning persons : I have endeavoured to avoid it, all I could, and as far as was consisting with the demands of truth, and the obligation not to disguise or dissemble what we think such.

As to the several particulars in the *Mosaic* account of the creation, these of themselves might afford matter for a distinct treatise : And such a one, I do indeed conceive, is wanting, to defend the *literal* sense of this part of Scripture, and to shew, that there is no necessity for recurring wholly to an *allegorical* one. I am sensible, some able and learned men still favour this latter way of interpretation ; most of the primitive writers have gone into it, and the fathers, especially, of the two first centuries : But authorities

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ties, alone, are not, I think, of weight enough to bring one into opinions of this sort : the *literal* exposition has in no-wise so many or great difficulties, as is commonly imagin'd ; and the objections to the other will, I fear, be found utterly unfurmountable.---- To leave this to a future enquiry, it will be sufficient at present to set down the general purport of the first chapters of *Genesis*.



CHAP.



C H A P. I.

IT pleased the Maker of the world, according to the history here mention'd, to form the first man and inhabitant of it, in a state of innocence and happiness, and to provide, for his residence, a place full of all delights, laying only one command upon him, the keeping of which was to be attended with the continuance of that blissful situation, and the breach with the loss of it : — He disobey'd, and it was lost.

Now let it be observed, before I proceed, that it does not appear in the account, we have of this matter, nor can be inferr'd from it, that men are born with any pravity or corruption, or any weakness in their nature, but what *Adam* had, as well and alike before, as after his fall : He was, 'tis true, through disobedience, made subject to death,
and

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and the various ailments and infirmities that lead to it ; so, could not transmit to his posterity other faculties or constitutions, than were in himself ; could not give them the good, he wanted : but notwithstanding, the frame of his mind was, to all intents, the same still ; his liberty, or natural power to will and act, to judge and determine, was not alter'd ; nor did he acquire new desires and affections : In other words, his reason and understanding, in the essence of them, remain'd, as they were, while his children had of course deriv'd to them the same power and freedom, which he had, and the same ability, whatever that was, to please or displease God, to follow or to depart from the dictates of nature : the difference, in regard both of him and them, was purely, that their state, and circumstances here on earth was changed ; instead of immortal, they were become temporary beings ; instead of an easy and undisturb'd condition, were doom'd to a laborious and afflicted one : but human nature itself was not renversed ; only its duration, and the terms of its enjoyments, were different : the soul, and its several properties, were alike ; the manner

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of life, and the space and period of it, were on another foot : In effect, the fault, which our grand parents committed, in no-wise darken'd, or took from their knowledge, but, in a few respects, unfortunately added to it : at first their nakedness was hid from them ; they found after, what it was to be naked, and wherein shame consisted, or rather, this new sense and instinct was super-added to their original perceptions : before their transgression, they tasted and conceiv'd, only, of happiness ; now, they distinguish'd between happiness and misery, that is, they *knew good from evil* ; before, they experienced, alone, pleasure and contentment ; now, they were sensible of pain and anxiety : and in respect of the woman, her affections were enlarged, or varied in another instance, *as her desire was to be to her husband, and he to rule over her.*

To return ; *Adam* and *Eve*, having broken the command laid upon them, are driven out of *Eden*. But nevertheless, the goodness and justice of God could not permit, either that the ends of his providence should be defeated by their sin, or that their
descen-

of PROVIDENCE. 9

descendants, who had no share in this particular guilt, should finally suffer, or be the worse for it : Man therefore is no sooner fallen, than his redemption and the means of it are appointed and promis'd ; * “ And I
“ will put enmity between thee and the
“ woman, and between thy seed and her
“ seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou
“ shalt bruise his heel : ” This text has been commonly thus interpreted : however, to *Abraham* God says, † “ I will make of thee
“ a great nation — And in thee shall all the
“ families of the earth be blest — ‡ And
“ all nations of the earth shall be blest in
“ him. — All which did imply, that God would in time raise up a man, of the posterity of *Adam* by *Abraham*, who should repair all the mischiefs, which the first man and woman had brought on their nature and species, and should prefer them to another paradise in the room of that, which was forfeited. Thus, the first scheme being set aside by the transgression of our ancestor, God in his wisdom prepares a second, where-

* Gen. iii. 15.

† Gen. xii. 23.

‡ Gen. xviii. 18.

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† Gen. xii. 23.

‡ Gen. xviii. 18.

by the posterity of *Adam* should be fully re-compens'd in another world, for what they were made liable to in this through his crime.

Thus much for the *Fall*. As to what follow'd, from *Adam* down to *Noah*, the *Mosaic* accounts are extreme short: yet I think, it may be collected from them, that the posterity of *Cain*, or led by his example, or rather from the natural imbecillity of their minds, trod in his steps, and went mostly into evil courses, and that the first short-liv'd traces or revivings of goodness afterwards were seen among the descendants of *Seth*: * “And to *Seth*, to him also there
“ was born a son. — then began men to
“ call upon the name of the Lord, —
Josephus, speaking of this second branch, declares, that they liv'd in innocence and virtue for seven generations; he declares this, but on what grounds, I cannot conceive, if from conjecture merely, or some suppos'd tradition: very often one may guess at his intentions, when he endeavours, frequently as he does, to supply either the deficiency

* Gen. iv. 26.

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of *Moses's* history, or to make amends in his own way for the conciseness of it; but why he supposes what I have now mention'd, or whether his reputation and abilities will warrant every thing of this kind, I am uncertain. *Enoch*, 'tis true, is said to have walk'd with God, and for that reason, one may judge, this was not the case of many more; for had others done so as eminently, it would, 'tis likely, have been recorded of them; the mentioning of one man's virtues so particularly, seems to imply, that virtue, in the same degree at least, was not very common. At the same time, from *Lamech's* prophecy of *Noah*, that he should comfort them *because of the curse*, we may suppose, that there was in his days, among a few men, a sense of that misfortune, and confidence in God's mercies.

But whatever degree of goodness there might then have been, whatever respect to religion among particulars, it lasted not long: As soon as the world thickned and grew populous, even the posterity, the whole posterity of *Seth*, except *Noah* and his

his family, as well as that of *Cain*, plung'd themselves in sin, and virtue and the fear of God were quickly and totally abandon'd. *The earth was fill'd with violence, and all flesh had corrupted his way.*





C H A P. II.

TH E experience of two thousand years had now made known the frailty and insufficiency of human nature. Man's natural capacity, or understanding, did not in fact, through that time, lead him to virtue and happiness ; wherefore, it must be suppos'd, either that he had not made so good a use of his reason, as he might, or else that reason was not then a due counterpoise to the force, that weigh'd against it, and that the passions were too strong for it, and quench'd its influence ; which is not unlikely ; for these were at first at their full growth, and could be urged to no higher pitch, while reason was feeble and in its childhood, and unfit therefore for a contest, which it is scarce equal to in its maturest state : The weaker reason is, this is always true, the more wilful and irregular are the passions, and the less resistance they meet with, the greater is their perverseness and
propen-

propensity to what is wrong; so that, whether reason, in its first feeble exertions, and in this morning of human nature, had strength enough to check the inclination to evil, may be very difficult to be determin'd.

It is not indeed possible, after all our thought, to come at a full view of ourselves: this *knowledge* is well said to be *too excellent* for us: we cannot penetrate into the soul, and inspect it in all its powers, and see by what laws they act reciprocally upon each other: such researches we may sometimes make in the several systems of matter, but cannot apply and carry them to our own spiritual frame and existence.

Nevertheless, here is my hold, since man's natural abilities and powers did not in fact, through the period spoken of, guide him to virtue and happiness, one may suspect, that those powers may not be, in all possible situations and circumstances, quite adequate to that end, and particularly that they were not then so: Instruction, study, and leisure and materials for it, with many other advantages, are requisite to give reason strength and lustre; nor under these or any advantages, nor with the help even of divine illuminations,

minations, does it always acquire the stability and perfection, needful to bring men to holiness, and thereby to make them happy. I take it then, that much was not to be hop'd for from it, in its primitive rudeness and debility, with no aid of any kind.

The true nature and unity of God, his omnipresence, and eternal existence, his constant providential care over his creation, and our continual dependance on him, are theories, not only sublime and great in themselves, but essential to the very being of virtue, which, without an acquaintance with them, has a very unsafe bottom : but useful and necessary as these truths are, they could not, certainly, have been known in the ages we are speaking of, neither through any faint glimmerings of tradition, if there were such, nor through any force, that reason could then exert ; for if they are discoverable at all by reason, which is not quite clear, yet are they not so, without a vast stretch of mind in very long deductions, or in very metaphysical arguments, which few even now are capable of entering into. And as to that *capital grand point*, the doctrine of a future state, of all others most productive

tive of true goodness, there must have been also in these times an utter ignorance of it: The wisest and most learned of the ethnic philosophers, we know for certain, thought and reason'd very darkly and dubiously on this subject; whatever they hinted about it, was plainly conjectural and imaginary, and what they rather hop'd for, than could prove, or were convinc'd of: a great number of ages, besides, were laps'd, before any of them attain'd, however obscurely, to this notion, if they did indeed attain to it of themselves, and without any divine impulse or inspiration.

The several knowledges therefore, now specified, which are such incitements to virtue, and so great supports of it, must have been hidden from the first race of men: they were necessarily destitute of these aids in particular, besides the other disadvantages that attended them: I do not then wonder, that they ran into so great and extensive a degeneracy; I wonder much more, that even one family remained free from it, and under the influences of religion and goodness: It was long after their days, and that thro' many successive lights and assistances, ere
human

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human reason came to be in any measure an uniform guide, and a monitor to be relied on : It is not so at this time, but to a very small number ; consequently, in its origin and infancy, must have been far from being a competent rule, and such a one, as was equal to men's wants, and perfective of their felicity.

To this cause, chiefly, ought we to impute the miseries of mankind in those times ; to this, the corruption, that reign'd so universally in them : or, if this is not admitted, and it be still said, that it was in man's power to have lived up to the dictates of religion and morality, yet must it be own'd, that it could not but be extreme difficult for him to do so : In fact, he did not : It pleas'd God, therefore, to make use of various methods, and provisions, to assist him in the exercise of virtue, and to enable him to attain all the happiness, destin'd for him in this state ; all which methods and provisions were, with infinite wisdom, suited to this great and good end. This is what I propose to explain fully, and hope to make appear in the subsequent chapters.

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In the mean time, it may be objected, that if it was not in men's power, or not without great and almost insuperable difficulty, to live well and virtuously, that then they could not justly have been punished, nor ought God to have been angry with them. They were not, in effect, punished, if I may give it that name, otherwise than necessity and their own good required; neither was God, that I can see, angry with them: 'tis true, he saw fit to cut off that generation, in the circumstances they were, by a deluge; but his declarations hereon by no means imply anger; on the contrary, they are full of regret and sorrow, and shew the deepest concern for such an extremity. † “ And the Lord
 “ said, my Spirit shall not always strive with
 “ man, for that he also is flesh---and it repen-
 “ ted the Lord, that he had made man on
 “ the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.--
 “ And the Lord said, I will destroy' man,
 “ whom I have created---for it repenteth
 “ me, that I have made them. Again, * And
 “ *Noah* builded an altar unto the LORD,
 “ and the LORD smell'd a sweet favour, and

† Gen. vi. 3, 6, 7. * Gen. viii. 20, 21.

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“ the LORD said in his heart, I will not
“ curse the ground any more for man’s sake,
“ for the imagination of man’s heart is evil
“ from his youth ; neither will I again smite
“ any more every thing living, as I have
“ done.” And more to the same effect. These
are the words of love and pity, not expressions of vengeance and wrath.

Secondly, GOD did not punish men, or deal with them, otherwise than necessity and their own good required : For, after their degeneracy was grown to such an height and universality, that no means of reformation were left, an all-good CREATOR could not suffer things to go on in that course, and it was more merciful far to exterminate that race at once, than to let them live any longer, overwhelm’d with sin and misery ; the consequence of which would only have been their perpetrating yet greater crimes, and leaving behind them a posterity wretcheder than themselves.



C H A P. III.

TH E deluge is pour'd down.--And now the great plan, for man's redemption and happiness, is going into execution ; the point still in the eye of Providence, and which all his dispensations are uniformly directed to.--For the accomplishing of this, and to the end that God's promise, *to drown the world no more*, might stand inviolable, two things were, chiefly, and indispensably, of importance.

It was requisite to prevent the same degeneracy from prevailing at any time after the flood, that had prevailed before it.

It was also requisite to keep the knowledge of One God, Maker of heaven and earth, from being quite lost and sunk in idolatry.

First, It was necessary to provide against a total loss of virtue and goodness a second time : for, if that had happened again, the same remedy would have been required again :
ano-

another universal corruption must have produced another universal deluge ; no reformation, in that state, being to be hoped for, or effected : in such a degeneracy, those methods of reforming, which, in other circumstances, might take place, either cease, or are made useless : the encouragements of praise and reward are wholly at an end ; persuasion and instruction, and the force and effects of example, subsist no longer ; neither would divine judgments themselves, probably, be of any efficacy in this state : When men are thoroughly hardened and confirm'd in sin, these do but harden them the more ; partially inflicted, they are not minded ; if more general, provoke only despair and defiance : wickedness, then, is made education ; steel'd by habit and countenance, it will not bend, nor alter ; the passions and tempers of men are crooked, and turn'd the wrong way ; while no good any more incites their hope, nor evil their fear : there is not room, in such a situation, even for the influences of GOD's *grace and spirit*, which are supposed to come only in aid of men's own endeavours : *these* may rekindle the sparks of dying religion,

but never create virtue and goodness, where they are not, and where the seeds of them are quite perish'd, and vice and wickedness have taken root in their stead; as the beams of the sun and moon, and the dews and zephyrs, call lillies up in gardens, but cannot raise them in the desert, nor spread them upon barren rocks.

If things, then, had come again to the same state of iniquity, as men could not have been reform'd, nothing could have been done effectually for their welfare; for, if men cannot be made good and virtuous, they cannot be made happy: God's promise, *to drown the world no more*, had better not have been made; for it would have been better, in that supposition, for mankind to be cut off, than not.

Secondly, It was necessary to keep the knowledge of the one God, Maker of heaven and earth, from being lost; as instantly lost it would have been, without the divine care and interposition: for, in those days of ignorance, men ran hastily and headlong into idolatry; they ran into it, as it were, by instinct; all they could conceive, or rather surmise, was, that there was something somewhere,

of PROVIDENCE. 23

where, existences of some kind or other, more powerful and perfect than they, and that they were dependent on, and subject to some such beings, invifible to them ; their impotent and helpless estate, the many dangers and wants they were involv'd in, their inability to relieve the one, or guard fufficiently againft the other, eafily led them to imagine this ; to hope, that fome of thefe beings were inclin'd to do them good, and to fear, that others would hurt them ; thofe they fought to for protection ; thefe they endeavour'd to appeafe with facrifices : and this priftin timidity, and feebleness in men's fpirits it was, that gave rife to the feveral religions, that obtained, in all times, through the heathen world : their original impreffions, and traditions concerning God and his Unity whatever they were, were foon eras'd out of their minds, and they foon forgot, as it was natural, what they did not underftand : then, the more gods they had, the fafer, they fondly imagin'd, they fhould be, and that, by preferring one fet of gods to another, they fhould engage them the more ftrongly in their favour : this error grew up out of their fimplicity, as plants grow out of the earth ; fear,

ignorance, and example, drove them almost irresistibly into it, and it became second nature.

Idolatry, then, must of course, without the Divine interposition, soon have become universal; which had it once been, it must always have continued so: if no one nation had had the knowledge of GOD, all others would have remain'd without it. It was (for I may be allowed to suppose the *Jewish* records, in this respect at least, true) amazingly difficult to preserve this knowledge among one nation only, and being preserved among them, 'twas a business of long time and preparation to convey it, by their hands, to the rest of the world: if then it was so hard a matter to bring and to keep mankind to the true worship and belief of One GOD, *even this way*, how could they have been brought to it by any other? how could all men have come by the knowledge of GOD, which it was almost impossible to preserve among a few, and which the rest came so hardly by, while partially preserved, if it had been once universally lost? Could human reason have recovered it? very probably, not: the true knowledge of GOD could not have been had but from GOD himself.

We

of PROVIDENCE. 25

We are apt to think, we clearly see these truths, and that we can as clearly prove them, now that they have been revealed to us: but how, let me ask, do we prove them?---All metaphysical reasonings, or arguments, as we term them, *à priori*, are of such a nature, that many, even wise men, have thought them not much to be relied on; they are, in fact, often precarious and deceitful, and, at best, within the apprehension of but a few men. As to reasonings *à posteriori*, such as are taken from the frame and order of the universe; these are indeed thought to rise to a real certainty, or very near it, of the being of a God, the cause of all things: but even here our understanding is soon lost and bewilder'd. Whence is that cause, and how is he the First Cause? What is eternity, what necessity of existence! existence uncaus'd, and without beginning, and without end! What is creation, or causing to be that which was not!

Say, notwithstanding, that we do prove by these last mentioned reasonings the being of God; yet do we not certainly prove, by them alone, all his attributes: we may perhaps conclude from such arguments the existence of a Creator, but can go very little further; can
neither

neither deduce thence his Unity, nor his providence and government of his creation : there may be other Creators, other eternal intelligent Agents, or this system, to which we belong, may have been so contrived, as not to need * GOD's care and superintendency. The proofs then of this sort, prove what they can, are only very fair presumptions or probabilities, within a small matter indeed of certainty, but not strictly and absolutely demonstrative : Atheism has no regular fix'd scheme to rest on ; no hypothesis, that is not expos'd to endless inconveniencies ; on the contrary, the supposition of a GOD, or First Cause, is a more specious and consistent philosophy, with much juster pretensions to truth, and accompanied with less and fewer difficulties.

However, to avoid debate, we will suppose, that reason, without revelation, could in time have attain'd to the knowledge of the true GOD : be it so ; yet the world might have grown old, and unnumber'd ages have pass'd, e'er one great genius had climb'd this summit of truth, and many more, e'er

-----* Divûm natura, necesse est,
Immortali ævo summa cum pace fruatur.

he could have carried others thither. 'Tis certain, that only the greatest of the ethnic philosophers, either before the *Christian* æra, or long after, had any tolerably just conceptions, if even *they* had such, of the * *Unity* of the supreme Being; the bulk of the world had them not: Be it then admitted, that the philosophers had, or might have had, such conceptions; yet how could they have brought mankind into their sentiments? could their lessons, with no authority, but their own, have grappled with, and got the better of reigning bigotry and superstition? was a probable notion enough to overturn establish'd, and deep-rooted falsehood? or could a refin'd speculative truth, far above common understandings, incapable perhaps of strict proof, at least of such as the generality could apprehend, have made its way through all opposition, and bore down pride, self-interest, folly, and the most stubborn prejudices? it will not be said, it could. Well then; admit even further, that these philosophers had, like the apostles, been invested with the power of working wonders,

* *I owe, said even Socrates, when he was dying, a cock to Æsculapius; see you pay it.*

for the confirmation of what they taught : yet still, the conviction, to have been wrought on men's minds, would have relied only on certain temporary occasional miracles, whose impresson would soon have been over : the evidence of former miracles, and of prophecies, and their completion, the testimony of a nation, that had known God from the beginning, the chain of his dealings and retributions with that nation, and the character of a Messiah, with the several astonishing and glorious circumstances belonging to it, and that great living wonder and prediction in one, the dispersion and present estate of the *Jews*, all this further evidence, which it pleased God to give mankind of his being and providence, would still have been wanting : all this, put together, was but barely sufficient to lead them into this belief and sense of things ; less therefore, or the least part of it, probably, would not have been so.

Far be it from me, confidently to assert, that God could have found no other method for accomplishing his designs, than that one, he made use of.---Yet, when, in our best judgment, we cannot see, how those designs could have been brought about by any other,
and

and, when the one, made use of, obtain'd its end in the amplest and most perfect manner, we may reasonably believe, and take for granted, that no other was to be found, or, which is the same thing, none so wise, and well suited to all the purposes intended.

Since, then, the knowledge of God, without his especial care, would, 'tis likely, have been early lost; and, if it had been once lost, could not, as far as we can see, have been recovered again, it was most necessary to make the surest provisions in this case, as it was alike necessary to prevent a second universal corruption.

Had not both these particulars been taken care of, and ensured, there would have been no room or possibility, in appearance, for bringing men finally to happiness: happiness, present or future, can flow only from virtue, and the knowledge of God; had virtue been once utterly extinguished, men would have been incapable of the knowledge of God, or any other to any good purpose, as without that knowledge they would have been incapable of pure and perfect virtue, which consists in the love of, and in trust in God, and an endeavour to be like him.

In

In order to prevent a second universal corruption, God saw it requisite, *among other things*, to operate powerfully by his holy Grace and Spirit, at certain times, and in distinction of certain men, for the benefit and instruction of others.

And, in order to keep the knowledge of himself from being lost, he saw it alike requisite to appropriate, and separate from the rest of the world, a particular people; to reign over them personally, if I may so say, and by grace and terror, and by all motives of omnipotence, even violence and compulsion, to bind upon them the belief and worship of the true God, and keep them from falling into the worship of false gods; that through their means, and by this channel, he might communicate to all mankind the knowledge of his Being and Attributes, as soon as they should be fit for it, and in a condition to make the right use of it.



C H A P. IV.

LET us consider the first of these branches, *viz.* the preventing a second total loss of virtue and goodness.

While *Noah* and his immediate posterity remained, the memory of God's judgments, and the sense of their own deliverance and preservation, with his example and authority, withheld them a while from sin: but these inducements to virtue waxing weaker, as mankind multiplied, and daily losing force, it was not long, e'er impiety and presumption got to a head again. They began, it is said, to build a city and a tower, that should reach unto heaven; a very unaccountable project, and which, if not manifest impiety, nor intended by them as such, was yet an act of madness and folly, approaching very near it, and which expressed that violent and wilful spirit, as shew'd a tendency to every thing inordinate, and that they

they would, thenceforth, be restrained from nothing, their imaginations led them to.

It was now, therefore, needful for God to interpose: and accordingly it pleased him, as the fittest means for remedying the mischiefs at hand, and in order to make way for farther applications of his wisdom, to scatter mankind abroad upon the face of the earth, and to divide them into several people and languages, who were before but one language and one people.

I own, it may be urged, and not without colour of truth, that the same thing would, in process, have happened of itself, * through the nature and necessity of human

* There was published, a few years ago, a posthumous work of some learned man, I think, of Dr. *Wotton*; in which it was shewn, with reference to the subject before us, that there are such specific innate characteristics in some languages, distinguishing them from all others, that they could not possibly have been derived from any other: If this is so, as I judge it may, what is the inference? Why, just nothing at all: This observation alone, if there be nothing else to be said, will not prove, nor even make it probable, that there was such a miraculous confusion of tongues, as *Moses* gives an account of; for languages, 'tis very possible, might have come by chance; people might have made them themselves, by consenting to call things by this or that name or sound, as new or original names and sounds are daily made for things newly invented.

affairs.

affairs. It may be so : but then this would have been a result of length of time, rising from causes, that must have ripen'd imperfectly and dilatorily into their effects, and mankind, long before it had come to pass, would have laps'd again into their former licentiousness, which would have obliged again to the same extremities : so that here was a plain and peremptory necessity for God to do that directly, and by the instantaneous act of his will, which might possibly have produced itself in ages ; nor was the miracle the less on that account, any more than the reason for it was to have been dispensed with : the benefit to accrue to mankind, by an immediate dispersion and confusion of tongues, could not have been accomplished by a slow and gradual one : such a one would have come too late, nor could the corruption, to be guarded against, have been prevented by it.

Nor is this argument at all supposititious or imaginary : the words themselves of scripture, in which this matter is related, do plainly imply as much.

D

And

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*And the LORD said, behold, the people is one ;---and this they begin to do, and now nothing will be restrained from them,---let us go down, and there confound their language.---*The meaning of which is, the people are now united and live together, and from what they are already a-doing, 'tis evident, they are prepar'd to run into all manner of enormities : therefore, that they may not do so, I will this moment scatter them abroad. — The reason, you see, that induced to the miracle, is given, before the miracle itself is mention'd, signifying clearly, that it pleas'd G O D instantly to disperse men, and confound their tongues, as the best and fittest means to prevent the wickedness, which they were going hastily into, in consequence of their keeping together in one body.

And that this was, in reality, the best and most effectual, if not the only method, his wisdom could have made use of for this end, will, I think, appear on a little consideration.---First then, by this expedient, wickedness and wicked projects were no longer to be contriv'd or carried on unanimously and universally ; for men, being thus
thrown

thrown into thousands of little colonies, and divided by mountains, rivers, and seas, could no longer associate and act together : at the same time, the irregularities, which might have their birth from a few of them, could not now be propagated to great numbers ; for, every nation being unacquainted with the languages of the rest, vice was not to be transferred from one to another, nor could that, which was the growth of some lands, take root in more : by this means, the contagion of wickedness had bounds set to it, and evil example was confin'd, and could not stretch its influence beyond one country.

Add to this, that tokens of Divine wrath, levelled on one people for their sins, might thenceforth be a warning to others to avoid the like sins : and as contests for dominion, extent of territory, and the like, must of course, in this state of things, arise between different countries, so blessings being bestowed on one, and denied to another, and success and victory being given to the good, and withheld from the bad, this, one may judge, might very naturally lead men in time to think of their true interest,

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and create an emulation for virtue among them.

In effect, men were so circumstanced now by being parcelled out into several nations, that they might, whenever God pleased, be made checks reciprocally upon each other, and be, in his hands, according to their respective virtues or demerits, the instruments of their own reward or chastisement: a wicked state, or community, being brought low, one more worthy could be exalted in the room of it; this people growing dissolute and abandoned, another, less debauched, may be made lords and masters over them.

On this footing, 'twas morally impossible, that an universal degeneracy should ever take place again, or that wickedness, let it prevail, as it could, in some parts, should prevail alike in all.---And as to partial immorality, whatever there might be of it in particular nations or societies, it could be of no very ill consequence, there being always room in this circumstance, to check and restrain it in such manner or degree, as might be required. Thus things were brought to a security, and men's welfare placed

placed on a true basis for the future, thro' God's wisdom in timely dispersing them, and changing their one language into many.

There is nothing in all the sacred writings, that has been so much the mark of ridicule, or lain more open to vulgar exception, than the affair now spoken of; wherefore I was the more desirous to rescue it, as well from irrational constructions, as from censures of levity: but still I will be so candid, as not to suppress any thing, I know of, that can be said fairly against it: It may be said, I guess, that the dispersion of men at this juncture, and the quashing of their mad counsels, might have been brought about, not only naturally and without a miracle, but directly and at once: I own it: A storm, for example, a very high and furious storm might have scattered and driven them abroad immediately: this is possible; but then, whatever this storm was, supposing it only to be natural, it could not have dispersed them to so great a distance, nor kept them asunder so long, but that they might easily have come together again, after it was over. The confounding therefore of their speech, 'tis highly credible, was the only measure,

that could have dispersed and divided them effectually, as well as instantly, and so as to answer fully the views of Providence.

This story of *Babel* then is not, after all, so strange a one, as some grave persons have seemed to think; is not likely to have been the invention of *Moses*, being at a loss to account for the variety of languages and nations; but, most probably, was set down by him under the impulse and conduct of that inspiring power, which made him a man so *mighty in thought and in act*.

To dismiss this topic, it was with mankind originally, while remaining in one body, as it is with a great popular tumult or insurrection: the multitude, in this bad collective capacity, run headily into mischief; but when once means are found to disunite and disperse them, their tempers and inclinations soon change; they then keep close to their separate districts, and follow their callings in quiet.

This dispersion of men was one proper and adequate means to keep them from falling again into an irremediable state of vice and iniquity.

of PROVIDENCE. 39

Over and above this, it pleased God, at different times, to send into the world divers excellent persons, for the edification of human nature, and remarkably to illuminate and pour his grace and favour upon them for this end: these were the heroes, † whom the great writers of antiquity, in their fables and allegories, make mention of; who broke the barriers of the prince of darkness, and weakned his empire, and therefore were declared to be descended from gods: that is, they were enlightned by the God of gods, and through his especial favour cleared the mists from men's eyes, and shewed them the paths to truth and virtue.

It will, I foresee, be objected here, that this is merely an assertion, a thing not to be proved, that there is no need to suppose, that these great men had any light or guide, but nature and reason: I own, we have no records, sacred or other, or any positive proof for support of this notion with respect to some of those great men; let it, then, be allowed to be only a supposition; yet it is

† ----- Pauci, quos æquus amavit
Jupiter, aut ardens evexit ad æthera virtus,
Diis geniti, potuere.

a rational one, and has probability on its side : for is it to be conceived, unless we admit supernatural assistance, that persons should rise in the most barbarous and illiterate times, equal for wisdom and abilities to any, that have been known in the most learned ? that, in this or that country, should stand forth, of a sudden, a great moralist or philosopher, while all around him was darkness and savageness ! Can one conceive, that, once in an age, such a one should shoot up, like an aloe among weeds and briars, and that he should thus get the start of his species, and tower so prodigiously above them, on his own strength only ! Could nature, or accident, create so vast a disparity ? Could it come merely from different organizations of sense and feature ? or was it the product of education, while as yet the arts of education were scarce thought of : this is not over-likely.

That these favour'd persons, therefore, were blest with heavenly illuminations, in some mode or measure or other, is a notion very reasonable in itself, and perfectly agreeable likewise to our justest ideas of an all-good BEING, provident to bring his creation regularly

of PROVIDENCE. 41

gularly and gradually to all the excellence, it could rise to.

There are, I know, who have strong prejudices to opinions of this sort ; yet certainly such opinions are of very natural origin, and what plain and common minds can scarce help falling into : the best and wisest, moreover, of the moderns have espoused this way of reasoning, as numbers of the ancients did before them, some of whom, I believe indeed unjustifiably, yet carried it so far, as even to think, there never was a truly great man, or person endued with a surprizing genius in any way, but who owed it to some divine inspiration, and was rais'd up by God for some extraordinary purpose of good to mankind.

Early, and at the head of those, who appeared in this high and sacred character, were *Abraham*, *Lot*, *Melchizedec*, *Job*, at least the writer of the book of *Job*, and others probably, whose names we have not heard of : *Abraham* and his son *Isaac*, travelled and sojourned in many lands, where kings were reprov'd for their fakes, and, by their fortunes, and the blessings attending them, wrought up to the fear of God :

After

After them rose *Hermes*, *Zoroaster*, *Orpheus*, *Pythagoras*, *Numa*, *Cyrus*, and the several great poets, law-givers, and philosophers among the *Greeks* and *Romans*.

Thus no possibility, it seems, was left of another universal corruption: mean time, virtue and moral knowledge imperceptibly advanc'd and gain'd strength, till, one nation copying from another, and succeeding times improving on those past, men became at length capable of apprehending the holy truths of God and his religion.





C H A P. V.

THE second thing, essential in the scheme of Providence, was the keeping the knowledge of the *only true God* from being wholly lost. This could not probably have been so well done, as by separating from the rest of the world a particular people, and training them gradually in that knowledge : for men's propensity to pluralities of gods was so natural, and predominant, that they ran into it at once and alike ; 'twas the sole habit, or characteristic, in which one nation did not differ from another : so that if some *one* had not been selected from the rest, and kept from mingling with them, and imitating their superstitions and follies, which they would have done, had they mingled with them, the knowledge of God could not have been preserved : contagions cannot be 'scaped but by flying from the infected.

It

It being necessary, therefore, that a particular people should be set apart, and divided from all others, let us go succinctly over, and just mark, the several steps, which it pleased GOD to take in order to it, in order both to set one nation thus apart from the rest, as his peculiar people, and when that was done, to confirm and maintain his true worship and belief among them.

It was not long after the deluge, ere men's minds were clouded and darkened, and their original apprehensions and ideas of GOD almost quite extinguished : idolatry, like a second deluge, had pour'd itself through the lands ; it had got footing even among the elder branch of *Shem*, and that, while *Noah* himself was still living, and they had his example and authority before their eyes. --- In this conjuncture, the time precisely, that such a step was required, *Abraham* is called; a man of virtuous and good dispositions, and of the tenth generation, or thereabouts, from *Noah* : he is sent forth, with all his substance, from his own country to another : GOD promises him an offspring, by his wife *Sarah*, in their old age, and to make a great nation of him ; promises also the land of
Canaan

Canaan to his posterity ; and declares, that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blest, and goes along with him, and is every where his rock and tower of defence : What could be more engaging and endearing, than these several circumstances ? What more proper to excite in a man affection, duty, and confidence towards God ? Moreover, the going down of his descendants into *Egypt*, their sufferings and bondage there, and their deliverance from it, and return to *Canaan*, after four hundred years, are severally predicted ; in consequence of which promises and predictions, *Isaac*, first, is born ; *Abraham's* faith and obedience, soon after, are exemplarily proved, and strengthened, and rewarded ; the same promises are then repeated to *Isaac* ; after him, to *Jacob*, and the heavenly correspondence is kept open with all three, during their respective lives : God converses with them face to face, and as friend with friend : so much was required to establish even *them* in the knowledge and fear of their Maker.

In the decline of *Jacob's* life his darling son, *Joseph*, is sold by his brethren to the *Egyptians* ; a famine ensues in *Canaan*,
and

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and those brethren are forced to go after him to buy food ; by this means they come, as was foretold, to reside in *Goshen*, and grow into a numerous and great people.

Thus, from a man and woman, childless, and far stricken in years, a nation is raised ; that nation, as it was begun, is propagated, and preserved by miracles ; the main things to befall them, from their beginning to the days of *Moses*, are foretold, before they began ; they are still kept apart, and distinct from all other nations, in which view a particular rite had been, early, instituted, and signal mercies and marks of divine favour incessantly accompany them : Even when they are fallen into slavery, God is still with them ; the more they are oppressed, the more they encrease and flourish ; their strength, beauty, and numbers rise with the cruelty of their oppressors, and all the while they have this comfort and support, the promise of heaven, in his set time, to visit and deliver them : all which visible tokens, and demonstrations, continued through ages, of the care and love of God towards them, could not but awake in them awful sentiments

of PROVIDENCE. 47

sentiments of that GOD, and belief and trust in him, as a BEING, superior to all others.

Let us review this matter once more : *Sarah* kept barren to old age, for the purposes of Providence, in her old age, as was promised, brings forth a son ; this confirms *Abraham's* faith in God : that son, on the point of bleeding, is rescued at the altar ; this confirms his faith yet more : the lives of *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, are diversified, and mixt with distress and danger, by which the power and goodness of GOD do more abundantly appear, and they have more and more reason to own him, and to rely on his favour and protection : on the same account, and with the same scope, is *Joseph* sold into *Egypt* ; hence his brethren and family settle there, and after his death become oppressed and afflicted : their settlement in this country was one great deliverance ; their affliction in it was in order to a greater ; the one tending to inspire gratitude to GOD, the other to keep up a dependence on him ; for had they enjoyed an unaltered prosperity, they would soon have forgot him : afflicted therefore became they, and oppressed, that they might look up to the GOD
of

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of their fathers for their deliverer : their sojourning in *Egypt* was of so long continuance, that they might be numerous enough to possess and fill the land, that was destined to them : their bondage and oppression was so heavy and lasting, to the end, their deliverance, when wrought, might strike keener and more durable impressions on them ; likewise, that the deep and affecting remembrance of their having been bondmen themselves, and tasted so much of its bitterness, might make them ever after merciful and kind to others in that circumstance : besides this, the iniquity of the *Canaanites*, as is said, was not yet full, and had those nations been extirpated, before it was so, their punishment would not have been proportioned to their guilt ; GOD in that case must have departed from the reason and measure of his justice : the same may be said with respect to the *Egyptians*, and the judgments at last brought upon them : neither was their iniquity yet full. So much depended on the treatment of the *Israelites* in *Egypt*, and on their continuance there so long.

In the mean time, all possible provisions had been made by GOD, to keep them from mingling

mingling with that nation, and to guard them from the idolatry of it : they lived in a particular province, or district, by themselves ; their very occupation, that of shepherds, was an abomination to the *Egyptians*, who thought it unlawful even to eat or drink with an *Hebrew* ; so that the *Hebrews* could have very little opportunity of society or commerce with them : then, the greater the tyranny they endured, and the more they were busied in the work of it, the less it was in their power to look into the customs and manners of their tyrants ; besides that, their very resentment, and hatred of such task-masters, could not but give them the strongest aversion to all their ways, so far as they might, haply, be acquainted with them.

Here, we see, is a series of wonders, which verify the predictions, that went before them ; a chain of great events, springing from one another, and drawn out through four or more centuries ; all tending, separately and together, to attach the seed of *Abraham* to GOD, and to prepare their way for being his chosen people, and which open to us in one view whatever there can

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be

be of beauty, harmony, and grandeur in moral distributions.

In truth, the more a thinking man revolves in his mind this train of affairs, and sees, how one nation are led, step by step, to a sense of the pre-eminence and sovereignty of the true GOD, in order to be set apart for his service, and to be, as it were, the repository of his sacred laws and religion, till all mankind were fit for the reception of them, the more he will confess and admire the signatures of wisdom and goodness, that appear through the whole œconomy, and in every part of it.

Now, as nothing more could, in appearance, have been done for this end; so nothing less, 'tis probable, would have been sufficient: the rudeness of human reason, in those days, was such, that to conceive rightly of the supreme BEING, was as much beyond its reach, as it was to explain or amend his works; the greatest force of mind, under the sublimest improvements, seems not at that time, or much later, to have been able to carry men such a length: the furthest they could go, the most they could be brought to, in numberless ages, was to conceive

of PROVIDENCE. 51

ceive of some particular God, as greater than all others : consequently, it became the peculiar care of Providence to bring some part of men, even into this imperfect notion ; they seem not to have been able to reason themselves into it ; they could not see it by their own reflection ; therefore the only way to convince them of it was by supernatural effects, and extraordinary interpositions of almighty Power ; which interpositions could not be too frequent, or too often repeated, to counter-balance their ignorance, and proneness to idolatry, and to induce them to worship one God alone : such manifestations were the only lights, by which they could see GOD, and if those lights had disappeared, they would have been in the dark again ; they but half saw him through this telescope, so could not have seen him at all, had it been withdrawn : *if GOD, says Jacob, that Jacob, who, like his grandfather Abraham, and his father Isaac, had conversed with his Maker, and beheld him in vision, If GOD will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me food to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in*

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peace, then shall the LORD be my GOD; that is, in this case, he would serve the LORD, rather than any other GOD.

All this preparation, then, it seems plain, was required only to bring one people in any degree to the knowledge and worship of GOD: much more was required to keep them to, and confirm them in that worship: what has been recited, serv'd no further, than to lead to this point, and make, as it were, the openings of it; still greater things were needful for securing it.

It is exceeding difficult to carry rude nature contrary to its humour and propensity, and to give it a happier bent, than what it took from its first fears, ignorance, or misapprehensions: let what can, be done, it will still be apt to slide back into its proper error; like a bowl, which, while the force, first given it, continues, rolls even to the goal, but when that is spent, curves and declines again with its own bias.

And thus it was with the unhappy *Israelites*, whose deliverance from their *Egyptian* thraldom, with all, that attended, and followed from it, we now come to consider.

C H A P.



C H A P. VI.

Remarkable and surprizing have been the fortunes and story of many countries, and kingdoms of the earth ; but none have had their chronicles so filled with wonder, or could boast such marks and designations of God's care and providence, as the *Jews* : begun, and raised up by Divine Power ; separated from all mankind, to be one day the blessing of all mankind ; driven from their country, when desolate and unfruitful, to come back to it, when flowing with milk and honey ; preserv'd from famine, while only a family, to be rescued from slavery, when a nation ; from a single family and a small number, in a surprizing short time, encreased to a great people, and after being an afflicted, persecuted people, delivered with a high hand, and made victorious over their enemies.

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They had lived happily in *Egypt* for one generation, and through the lives of the founders of their tribes : at length, a prince succeeding, who was a stranger to their fathers, their sufferings and oppression began, encreasing gradually, as they encreased, and growing forer and more grievous, as they grew more potent and populous : at last, their cry cometh up to heaven, and their deliverer is sent them : and, as *Joseph* had been greatly rescued and exalted, in order to the bringing them into this country ; so *Moses* was no less eminently preserv'd, and distinguished, for the carrying them out of it ; that, thus, this whole dispensation might visibly be the finger of GOD, and that the tokens and footsteps of his providence might be seen more deeply engrav'd throughout it.

And now the viol of wrath is poured forth. — *Moses* stretcheth forth his wand. — The heart of *Pharaoh* is hardned. — Not hardned, that he might be punished for what was wrought upon him by divine impressi^on, and which he could not help : herein was no crime : the guilt of *Egypt*, both prince and people, was their inexorable cruelty to
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the *Hebrews*, who had in nothing deserved such treatment from them, and to whose ancestors they had been abundantly indebted : this was a guilt, needed no aggravation : *Pharaoh's* heart, then, was hardened not to add to his crime, but that there might be the more scope for the hand of God to move in, and that his punishment, as well as God's power, might be the more conspicuous, by being seen in greater diversity : had he not been hardened, he could not possibly have continued so obstinate in refusing to let the *Israelites* go ; and if he had not stood in that obstinacy, there would not have been the opportunity and the reasons for multiplying God's wonders in *Egypt* ; those wonders, which were to convince the *Jews* in particular, that the LORD, *Jehovah*, was high above all gods, and which were to be declared by them to their children's children, and to be the ground-work and support of the great system, that followed.

With this intent *Pharaoh's* heart was hardened : and to this intent also the magicians were permitted to do some of the same things, which *Moses* did : I say, permitted : for, however there will always be in ignorant

times and nations, forcerers, or persons assuming that name and character, yet 'tis certain, there is not, nor can be a real art-magic; there can be no natural power in man to do supernatural things, none by himself, none in concert with other agents: all suppositions of this kind are senseless.

The truth is, God at this time, suffered enchantments, let me call them such, whether by the ministry of spirits commissioned to this end, or by powers immediately communicated to the enchanters themselves, to take place in a certain degree, as the fittest means, the more thoroughly to harden *Pharaoh*, and that it might be seen finally, that the imagin'd arts of forcerers, and invisible spirits, were uncertain, and confin'd, and no stress to be laid on them; that those forcerers, and those spirits, good or evil, no matter which way you understand it, had no power, in effect, but from God; none, but what he gave them leave to exert, and which he could limit and restrain at pleasure; and that all impostors of this kind were, in his hands, alike with the rest of his creation, whenever he saw good, instruments
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of PROVIDENCE. 57

for executing his will, and fulfilling the ends of his government.

In other words, the power, given to the magicians, was given, partly, to expose the vanity and impiety of all, who placed confidence in any help, or had any dependence, except in GOD only ; to shew, that such hopes and dependencies would always deceive and forsake those, who trusted to them ; that there was no intrinsic power or efficacy in magic, and that whatever was done under that name and pretence, was wholly through GOD's permission, and subject to his controul.

Thus it is said in *Deuteronomy*, that, *if a false prophet foretold any thing, and the thing foretold should come to pass, with design to tempt them to go after other gods, they were yet not to believe him, nor to worship other gods, for GOD permitted this only to prove them. —*

Had the magicians had any ability, independently of GOD, whether inherent in themselves, or in virtue of infernal, or other assistance, to do supernatural things, they might as well have followed *Moses* through all his miracles, as through a few of them ;
might

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might as well have call'd up *lice*, as *frogs*; as well have chang'd day to night, as water to blood: but they had not, nor possibly could have, any such power: it is contrary to all sense, contrary to all our ideas of GOD, to suppose, that any being, except himself, can create and give life; (this were supposing other gods;) or, that any spirits, good or evil, can do acts contrary to nature, and alter the stable and eternal laws of it; or, which is more absurd, that they can empower men to do such acts: the miracles of the magicians, then, were as truly miracles, and virtually as much the work of GOD, as those of *Moses*; they were as truly done through his almighty will and power, and could be done by no other: the giving life and being to a fly, or worm, or any insect, is as great an act, as to give it to an elephant or a lion; the making a lesser serpent, as much a miracle, as to make a greater, or to tell the tempest, where it shall ravage, and where not: all such acts imply equal power, and can come, directly or indirectly, from him alone, in whom is all power: the forcerers did some of these acts, and could not do the rest; this was demonstration,

tion, that it was not by their own power, they did them: so that, by this procedure, while the heart of *Pharaoh*, as I have said, was more thoroughly hardned, and occasion thence given for multiplying of God's wonders, the fallacy and presumption also of all supposed conjurations and magical arts was, in great measure, detected and disarmed.

Upon the whole, these methods, which it pleased God to take for vindicating his name and pre-eminence, were the fittest and rightest, in all respects, that could be taken in those ages and circumstances of the world: men then, seemingly, were quite incapable of understanding the Unity of the Divine Nature, or of being reasoned even into the faintest notions concerning it; their fears and weakness, on the contrary, led them into all manner of follies and superstitions, as witchcraft, auguries, - incantation, idol-worship, and the like: the permitting, therefore, certain wonders, supposed to be done by different agents, than God, and the doing others, seemingly greater and more marvellous, and which such agents were not permitted to do, these were the only proper proofs to men, at that time, of God's supreme

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preme authority and omnipotence : nor do we see his wisdom perhaps more clearly in ought, than in the perfect suiting and adapting, in this wise, his several operations to the nature and temper of the respective times and occasions, wherein they were manifested.

And hence it is, we so frequently meet with in holy writ expressions of this kind. — *Who is like unto our God? which of all the gods can be compared unto him? He is high above all gods — the God, that alone doth wondrous things — the God of Abraham and Isaac* — with many others of the like import, and which were modelled to the unripen'd apprehensions of men in those days, when speculative truth and reasoning were out of their reach, and they were to be kept stedfast with GOD, as by such applications, which might most easily affect them, so by those forms of speech, that lay most naturally to their understandings.

The God of Abraham! And was he not as truly the GOD of his whole creation, and of all lands and people, as of *Abraham* and his seed? — *Who is so great a God as*
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of PROVIDENCE. 61

our God! Was there really, then, any other god? No; but these phrases, as I said, were used in compliance with their weakness, and signified to them, what only they could be yet made to comprehend, that the LORD was supreme over all, and had no rival, or competitor, for power and dominion, and consequently, that it was in vain to put trust in any beside.

In this sense and construction then, in which I have explained it, and I am apt to think, in no other, is to be understood the affair of the *Egyptian* forcerers: in the same sense I understand that other fact of the witch of *Endor*; she had no ability of her own, or, through intercourse with any spirits, to call up the ghost of *Samuel*; but it pleased GOD to suffer it to be done then in views of his providence: no being could have enabled her to do that, or any other such thing, except GOD: no demon, or familiar, neither good or evil spirit, has, 'tis probable, any power to impede or assist men in their actions, to do them good, or do them hurt, unless GOD directly enables and commissions them to do so: and in this way, likewise, I take it, we ought to interpret what is related,
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in the gospels, of persons possess'd and tormented by devils ; which persons, if I am in the right in this notion, were really possessed by devils, and were not madmen only, or lunatics, as is more commonly believ'd.

Thus much for those particulars, which preceded the *Israelites* going out of *Egypt*, and which, by various appeals to their senses, and by the evidence of their eyes, were to convince them, that their God was greater than all other gods ; for they could not then (which is what I have more than once observed, yet will it be useful to explain it a little further) enter into the abstract idea of one God, or Being, Author of all beings, nor deduce his Existence and Unity from his regular creation ; but with the rest of mankind ignorantly believ'd, that there were great numbers of celestial existences, like him, and that, as to private persons and families were given their *Lares*, or *household* divinities, so every country and people had their respective national god or gods.

It is recorded of those nations, who, after the captivity, were planted in the cities of *Samaria*, that they knew not the manner of
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of PROVIDENCE. 63

the god of the country, and that afterwards being taught his worship, they worshipped him, yet serv'd their own country-gods at the same time; so universally fixed in men's minds was this belief, till the days of christianity: it seems, indeed, to have been of the proper and genuine growth of human nature, and so much so, that it could never yet be wholly extinguished, nor is even to this day, many *Christians* themselves having in effect revived, or rather substituted in its room something very like it, by allotting to different kingdoms *guardian saints*, or *patrons*, and paying homage and worship to them, as such.

It is most true, and would have been very probable, though there had been no grounds for it in scripture, that God has, through all ages, destin'd angels, or immortal spirits, to preside not only over states and empires, but to be protectors of particular men and houses: this were a probable opinion, tho' not warranted by holy writ; for what with more reason can we suppose, than that it makes great part of the happiness of angels to perform the duties and functions, assign'd them by God? and what
more

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more glorious, or useful function, can the most exalted creature have, than to watch for the safety and welfare of his fellow-creatures, and to be busied in procuring their good, and in averting evil from them?

Such probably always was, and will be, in part, the employment of beatified spirits: but since men in their pristine ignorance, mistook them for, and ador'd them as independent deities, not subservient to, or acting by the ordinances of their common Father and Maker, it was most fitting for GOD, when he selected a particular nation, in order to be their GOD in a more eminent manner, to let them see, what only they were capable of seeing, that he was far above all such supposed gods in power, and that no other could do the things, which he did.

These were the arguments, best suited to their humble capacity, and the wisest way, in which their Maker could treat them, until such time, as they should be able to know and recognize him by truer mediums.

Let it be observed further, in regard to the miracles, which GOD wrought in *Egypt*, that, to the end, the views of his providence,
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of PROVIDENCE. 65

here mentioned, might be fully answered by them, they were of such a sort, as must be known to come from God only, and as must be necessarily seen, and own'd, for his immediate real work, the work of a Being superior to all possible powers of man, and could not be mistaken for such, nor could be in any manner deceptions, nor the result of any possible human causes, or merely natural accidents. — Swarms, for example, of noxious insects might, from natural causes, happen to cover a country ; but would be of their ordinary kind and quality, and would not destroy one field, while they spared another. — Tempests of hail, fire, and thunder, might lay waste a fruitful land ; but could not make distinction between *this*, and *that* part of it, nor between the flocks and herds of different persons. — From disorders in the elements, as might then have been imagined, or from irregular motions of planets, a darkness might have prevailed ; but then that darkness would have been like common night, not gross and dense, so as to be felt, and would have been but of short duration. — Pestilence, or the arrow, that flieth unseen, may

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sweep away great multitudes ; but when it does so, it always does it promiscuously, and indifferently ; it cannot single out one, and no more, from every house and family, and that the *first-born* ; it cannot, in the desolation it makes, strike only the original inhabitants, while it passes, over the stranger nation, that sojourns with them.

And as those miracles were suited to the general purpose of God's Providence, in asserting his supreme power, and sovereignty ; so his wisdom order'd it, in respect to some of them, that they were, in particular, expressive of the measures of divine justice and retribution, while they were fitted also for further ends and uses : thus, the *Egyptians* having cruelly endeavour'd to destroy all the male *Hebrew* children, their own *first-born*, by just retaliation, were cut off, and this great event was, besides, the noblest basis imaginable for a ritual religion, such being then necessary, and the most sacred and solemn thing, a *commemorative* festival, or day of *thanksgiving*, could be grounded on. Again, the *Egyptians* had despoil'd the poor *Israelites* of the fruits of their labour and industry, bowing them down to every yoke

yoke and servitude; the riches, therefore, and spoil of *Egypt*, were given them, in recompence for their long hardships, and those riches serv'd, afterwards, for materials to build the ark of the testimony with.





C H A P. VII.

I HAVE shewn the necessity there was of keeping the knowledge of the true God from being wholly lost and sunk in idolatry; and that there was no way so probable of doing this, as by separating a particular people from the rest of the world: the several steps also, which it pleas'd God to take thus far (that is, from the calling of *Abraham* to the going of the *Jews* out of *Egypt*) for supporting, and making good, this branch of his system, have been produced and explain'd; and it must, I think, appear to an impartial reader, that the whole procedure was wise, regular, and perfect, such in every part and circumstance of it, as the nature and reason of things demanded, and what only could have been adequate to the end proposed.

Let us now proceed to consider the sequel, and what was further required for preserving
God's

of PROVIDENCE. 69

GOD's true worship and belief among the *Jewish* nation ; for much more was still required, as to this great point ; so very feeble were their understandings : whatever was past, would have lost its force, but for what came after ; and former miracles have soon been *forgot* by them, if they had not been succeeded by new ones : — nor ought we to think, which has been frequently done, of such a *forgetfulness*, as an infirmity peculiar to this people only ; any other people, as far as I can see, the state of human nature then being considered, must have shar'd, more or less, of the same frailty, and very probably would have acted, in some degree, as they did.

GOD, therefore, foreseeing, what their weakness would still lead them to, notwithstanding the mighty things he had done in *Egypt*, continues to work his wonders among them. For this, he leads them, in that memorable march, with pillars of cloud and fire ; divides the great deep, and they take their way through it, under convoy of angels : for this, the fountains of bitterness are made sweet. — They eat also of the bread of heaven, and drink of rivers, gushing
F 3 from

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from adamant: thus, *he bore them on eagle's wings, and brought them unto himself*, even to his holy mount, *Horeb*, at what time he came down to them in the cloud, and they saw the glory of God, and heard his voice. *

And here it pleased him to establish his covenant with them, and to give them a system of laws and statutes, such *as no other nation had*, and which were, not only most excellent in themselves, but were in all respects likewise fitted to the temper, and wants, of that people, in that age, as well as to the future intents and purposes of Providence.--- The *moral* part of these laws contain'd whatever was just and righteous; the *ceremonial* part had every thing, that was pompous, and refulgent; the former inspired probity, and goodness; the latter, awful and grand conceptions of God: the one purified the heart; the other entertained the senses: *this* was the essence of their religion; *that* the

* The *Jewish* historian calls it --- *his immortal voice* --- which, in my judgment, is a poor and low way of speaking: *Dii immortales* was language right enough for the mouth of a pagan, but that epithet, applied to the one only true God, seems very contemptible.

pride,

of PROVIDENCE. 71

pride, and nobility of it : however, the latter was instituted, not for its own sake so much, as for the sake of the former ; the *ritual* law was chiefly for an *inducement* to beget obedience to the *moral*, and as the *means* to guide them to virtue and holiness, and unite them to God.

Nor could such *inducements*, and such *means*, possibly have been dispensed with at that time : the path of virtue would have look'd too rugged and thorny, had it not been chequered with such roses, and if there had not been enamel'd on it, wherewith to please the eye, or amuse the passions ; the way, at first, to make religion appear lovely to them, was to give it a face of gaiety and pleasure, and the way to make the true God more desirable in their eyes, than false gods, was to cloath his worship with lustre and magnificence, and to add to it all the spirit and delight, that could be superinduced from external things : Hence the inexpressible riches, and glory, of the *tabernacle* ! the resplendent *priesthood* ! the trumpets in the *new-moon* ! the costly *unguents*, and the like ! all these things, interwoven with, and being, as it were, the garment of moral goodness, serv'd, at the

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beginning,

beginning, to recommend it to them, and to remind them continually of it.

And further, that religion and virtue might be yet more essentially their care, and that they might not be distracted by attention to different things at once, their civil and religious polity, their government and worship, judicial and sacred affairs, were made one, and blended each in the other: what was an act of *religion*, was at the same time an act of *state*.

Thus the service of God became, in effect, their whole and only concern and occupation, at the same time that it was so modelled, as to be a kind of perpetual festival, or holy-day, making that their constant recreation, which was their duty.

They could not be brought to the esteem, and practice, of what they did not understand, without being allured to it by something, which they did understand: external, and sensible things, lay within their reach and comprehension; but to perceive the reasonableness of moral action, and the natural sanctions of virtue, was above it: and on this account it was, that their law was, not only, a mixture of morality and ceremony,

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mony, but that the *moral*, as well as the *cere-*
monial part of it, was enjoin'd merely in
virtue of the divine authority, and made
binding only, as it was the command of
God: the reason to excite them to virtue,
which they could, then, best understand,
was its being commanded by God; as its be-
ing mix'd with such rites, as were pleasing
to sense, was what would make them best
relish it. The lures, which fail not to catch
human nature, are outward shew and osten-
tation; and we see, in fact, at this day, that
people, every-where, pursue these gauds of
religion, and are always most fond of the
tire and *drapery* of it; whence even wise
and good men have sometimes thought, that
'tis expedient still to indulge these things, in
some degree, to the vulgar, in order to keep
up a sense of God and duty in their mind.
It need not then be said, of what absolute
necessity such matters were, in the early times,
we have been speaking of.

In this manner were the *ritual* and *moral*
oeconomy directed to their respective sepa-
rate ends and uses, while both the one and
the other had the same final view, which
was to attach and unite this nation (the
Jews)

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Jews) to GOD, by giving them just ideas of his adorable Being and Attributes : his Power and Greatness they saw in the *Regale* of his worship and habitation ; his Wisdom and Moral Perfections they would, in time, learn from the perfect reasonableness and goodness of his moral laws : the parade and brilliancy of their religion, which shew'd the Creator in such august lights, made his commands respectable ; as the wisdom and goodness of those commands would, by degrees, make them amiable : so that the whole tended, and conspired together, to make good, as far as could be done by this particular means, the second general branch of the divine System, which was the *preserving the knowledge and worship of the true GOD among men.*

What I have here observ'd, in respect of the *Mosaic* rites, relates chiefly to such of them, as were form'd for grandeur and decoration. — As to the rest, some of these might, probably, regard purity and cleanliness, or the particular habits and complexions of the *Jews*, or the nature of the climate, and country, they were to settle in.

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To proceed then, it pleased G O D, at mount *Horeb*, to divide the *Hebrew* nation from all others, and to sign and seal, if I may so say, his covenant with them : Here, he adopted, and sanctified them ; here chose them for his peculiar people ; he chose them, 'tis true, with eminent distinction ; but that distinction was not such as implied less love for, or regard to, the rest of his creation : this, I know, has been frequently objected, and this is what they themselves were sometimes so weak as to imagine ; but nothing ever was more without grounds : the choice, it pleased G O D to make of them, was with view to the general good, no less than theirs : instead of being partial favour to one nation, it was, in reality, grace and mercy to all mankind : in other words, the distinction and honour, shewn the *Hebrews*, was at the same time kindness and compassion to the whole world.

The all-wise and good Being, whose eye penetrates that *nature* he is the fountain of, saw, how hard it would be to keep in a true sense of his sovereignty, and of the *unity* of his God-head, *this*, or any nation : he saw, that the utmost exertions of power, even
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the whole artillery of his wrath and terrors, would be scarce enough to prevent their falling wholly into idolatry : he, therefore, selected *one people*, to the end those judgments and severities, without which idolatry could not be prevented, might be confin'd to one people : all other nations ; all the *ethnic* world, were sure at last to reap the benefit of this *dispensation*, unconcern'd in the fate of those, to whom it was given, and without sharing in any of its possible miseries and misfortunes : the fruit and glory of it was to the *Gentiles* ; the danger to the *Jews* : *Jews*, and *Gentiles*, were alike to be bless'd in the seed of *Abraham*, while the former only were liable to the extremities, entail'd on them, if they forsook God.

The favour then, shewn them, so far from being partial, or unjust, in regard to other nations, was more properly, in this one respect, favour to those nations, than to themselves : if mercy *embraced them on every side*, or if judgments were inflicted on them, 'twas still for the sake, and good, of the common creation : the whole world, in the fulness of time, that world, as has been said, that could in no wise be involved in their particular calamities

of PROVIDENCE. 77

calamities and distresses, were yet certain to enjoy the advantage, accruing from them, the advantage of being brought quietly and safely, as soon as it could be, to the knowledge of the true GOD, and of the way to eternal life.

The truth therefore is, this one people were no other than instruments in the hands of GOD, for procuring finally the happiness of all the rest: all the *families of the earth* were to be called through them, and it did not affect mankind in general, whether by walking duly in GOD's ordinances, they were crown'd with the most signal blessings, or whether by departing from them, *as it happened*, they drew on themselves as signal curses: in either case, the *Gentile* estates were safe, and alike assur'd of GOD's determin'd favour towards them; in either case likewise, the *Jews* were to be the means for bringing this about, if distinguished with *rewards*, or if devoted to *wrath*.

In the mean time, it was the most ardent desire of their heavenly Father, that they should deserve the *one*; and avoid the *other*; and to the end they might do
so,

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so, no methods were left untried, no motives unoffered: forgiveness, long-suffering, and persuasion were all exercised in this gracious view, alternate mercies also and rigours, the severest threatnings, and the most tender endearments. But, in all events, whatever they suffer'd for it, how keen and fore soever their afflictions might be, 'twas absolutely necessary, that the knowledge and worship of the *one God, Maker of heaven and earth*, should be preserv'd among them: the success of all, the sum and completion of things, depended on this; it was to be effected at all expence, and through all difficulties: and *this* alone was the true reason, *this* and no other, as I hope, will fully appear, that the *second commandment* was conceived and expressed in the terms, in which we read it.



C H A P.



C H A P. VIII.

THOU shalt not make unto thee any graven image — thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I, the LORD thy GOD, am a jealous GOD, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them, that hate me, and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me — There is, perhaps, nothing, in all the sacred writings, that has, with so much reason, perplex'd and disturb'd the thoughts of learn'd and good men, as the *commandment* here recited; nothing, which the assertors of religion could more hardly defend, or the opposers of it more speciously object; and it must be own'd, if other exceptions, that have been made to revelation, had as fair a colour, it would be no wonder, if the *horn of infidelity* was exalted. — This matter then deserves a very serious consideration.

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To punish the innocent for the faults of the guilty, and to reward the guilty for the good deeds of the innocent; to love men for merits, and hate them for demerits, not theirs; to shew them favour for virtues they did not practise, and afflict them for crimes, they did not commit: this is what at first sight, flies in the face of reason; it thwarts, and confounds, all our ideas of justice and goodness, and is contrary to our clearest conceptions of the nature, and attributes, of GOD: we should call any man most unjust and cruel, that acted on these principles: and shall we affirm of an all-wise and good GOD, that he does so? Far be it from us to assert this: GOD can no more depart from the rectitude, or moral necessity of his nature, than he can cease to be; can no more do what is unequitable, than the doing of it would make it equitable: the word, *God*, is only a name for infinite wisdom, and goodness; and to say, that infinite wisdom, and goodness, is governed by principles, not wise, nor good, is infinite contradiction: so that, tho' the goodness of a maxim, or action, will not prove alone, that it comes from GOD, yet its badness will always prove, that it

of PROVIDENCE. 81

it does not come from him, and tho' a principle, or action, is not made just, because it is from him, yet its being unjust absolutely shews it is not from him.

It is then undeniably certain, that the second commandment is not to be understood, as it commonly has been, in a general and indefinite sense, and as the uniform law and measure by which God acts: under this interpretation, we cannot possibly make it consist with his justice and goodness: it is therefore to be understood in a limited sense, and as confin'd to one particular case, that is, as regarding alone the sin of idolatry, and this only with respect to the *Jews*, and not as a rule, which God invariably, and universally, prescribes himself: and that it was originally intended to be understood so, is plain from hence, that these words, *for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities, &c.* are annexed to this commandment only, and not to any of the rest: it is not said, *Thou shalt not kill, for I the Lord thy God* — It is not said, *Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery, for I the Lord thy God* — No; this threatening is limited to this one circumstance,

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stance, and can be extended to no other : the reason given, *that the Lord is a jealous God*, specifically applies it to the single crime of idolatry, and would be no reason at all in respect of any other crime : *Thou shalt not worship graven images, for I am a GOD jealous of my glory, who will not suffer it to be given to another, and in this case I will visit the sins of the fathers on the children.*

Nor does it appear, that GOD did ever make this visitation in other cases ; the contrary is evident in many instances ; thus, after having declared, as we find *Deuteronomy* the 1st, that not one of that evil generation, that is, of the wicked and rebellious *Israelites* then living, should go over to *Canaan*, except *Caleb* and *Joshua*, 'tis added, *moreover, your little ones, which, ye said, should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither ; and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it.* The threatening then in this commandment, 'tis plain, was far from being a constant law and measure of action to the divine Wisdom.

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In this nature is the case before us : God
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of PROVIDENCE. 83

Let it be so, it will be said, this does not mend the matter : it is alike unjust to punish the innocent on account of the guilty, whether it be for the sin of idolatry, or any other ; whether for one or more sins, the injustice is still the same : that which is unjust or unreasonable in general, is so in particular. But this assertion is not true : circumstances give things another nature, and essence : particular times and occasions, expediency or necessity, alter the reason of action, and the standard of right and wrong : it is unreasonable to take another man's sword or weapon from him, but not, if I am sure he intends to kill himself with it ; it is unreasonable to assault or hurt other men, but not when we do it in our own defence, or that of our country : thus the same action, which would be ordinarily unjust, may not be so in every circumstance and situation, and most of all, if public good requires it, and cannot be otherwise secured.

Of this nature is the case before us : God saw the absolute necessity there was of preserving his true worship and belief among one people : he saw also, how difficult it would be to put this point out of

danger, and that all, that could be done towards it, would be but barely enough: to the several methods, therefore, already mentioned, which his wisdom made use of to keep the *Jews* from falling into idolatry, he added this seemingly severe declaration, that if they did do so, they should not only be punished for it in their own persons, but in the persons of their descendants for four generations.

And this was one of the most forcible and powerful motives to engage them to their Maker, that could have been propounded: for, of all the instincts and affections, born with us, none is so strong, as that of love to our offspring; which love grows still stronger, the lower it descends: men will sometimes fear for their posterity, who will not fear for themselves; they will avoid crimes for their sakes, which they would not avoid for their own, as they will likewise exert acts of valour, and meet dangers, on this account, which they would not do, if their personal proper good were only interested: the bowels, that are hardened for themselves, will often yearn for their babes; and, in truth, it must be an uncommon

mon damp and draw-back on the spirit of a wicked man, meditating guilt, when he sees, and is conscious, that that guilt will entail misery on his children's children.

Let it be observ'd likewise here, that the denunciation, now spoken of, is not given at large, and indefinitely ; not extended to the whole posterity of the guilty, but limited to the third and fourth generation : there it stops : and the reason is, that this instinct of love for our offspring keeps its warmth and vigour till about that time ; after which it dies away, and quite ceases to operate ; as in the animal world also, the said instinct has its term prescrib'd it to work in, and never goes beyond it. Suppose, it were certain, that *England*, a thousand years hence, should be conquered, and all the inhabitants cut off ; who would give himself any concern about this ? Or, if any one did, what *languour*, how little *pathos*, would that concern have ? Men would consider it, just as they do the day of judgment : but if this fate were to befall them in their children's or grandchildren's days, faintings and tremblings, would be in every heart ; their *souls* would consume within them for sorrow.

Thus wisely and perfectly does GOD always adapt the means of things to their end ; it being needful to denounce a judgment, that was to act upon a natural passion, or instinct, the judgment is made to be in force, as long as the passion it related to subsisted, and to expire with it. A longer continuance would have been of no use, and to no purpose.

The threatening, therefore, to punish the *Jews* thus far in their posterity, if they forsook GOD, was one of the most likely ways to keep them faithful to him : it was an argument to human nature ; an application, that touches it to the quick, and as such, could not sure be omitted, by heavenly wisdom, in a concernment, on which so much depended : all other methods for weaning, and keeping this people from idolatry, scarce, but scarce, and in a long time, had their effect, tho' strengthened by this, and so very probably would have failed without it.

Here, then, seems to have been a reason, by no means to be dispensed with, for GOD, in one particular instance, to take, or to threaten to take, measures, which would not,
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in general, consist with justice, according to our best ideas of it.

We even find, that human law-givers, and human laws, do the same thing, tho' not through the same or an equal necessity; as in cases of *high treason*, and some others, where the penalties, adjudg'd to the traytor, devolve to his innocent posterity; and this, not only to the third and fourth, but to all generations; and the reason is, that it is judged, the peace of society, and safety of government, could not stand without such severity: nor was this ever thought unjust by any one: and if this way of acting is not unjust, when exercised for the sake of one community; much less could it be so, when exercised for the sake of the whole world: if it is not unjust in man, where the reasons of it are confin'd; much less was it so in God, where the reasons were so much larger and more extensive, and in consequence the necessity so much stronger.

But further, there is a great and wide difference between this proceeding in man, and in God: when man involves the guiltless in the fate of the guilty, he can make them no amends for it hereafter; those for-

tunes and privileges, the loss of which they lament, while living, cannot be restored to them after their death : it is otherwise with GOD : he, who has the care of our being through all eternity, can recompense the innocent, in what manner, and in what worlds, and as bounteously, as he pleases, for any temporary hardships, which the reasons of his government may have obliged him to lay upon them.

Moreover, the rigour of this sentence, of *visiting the sins of the fathers on the children*, will appear still less, if it be consider'd, that the visitation, denounced, was *national* : let *national* calamities be ever so severe, and however every one must share more or less in them, yet virtuous and innocent men, while they are afflicted, as *members of the whole*, may be regarded and protected, as *individuals* : GOD still has it in his power to do them good in their separate capacities, and the blessings of life, and health, and contentment, are still open, and in his hands : amidst the greatest public distresses, he may dispense these private favours.

Lastly, let it not be forgot, that as this sentence was not of a general purport, but
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of PROVIDENCE. 89

particular to one crime ; so neither was it to be permanent, or to last any longer than the necessity lasted, which occasioned it. Accordingly, when the danger the *Jews* were in, of lapsing into idolatry, was become less, and when there was no further likelihood of the knowledge and worship of God being wholly lost among them, we then find, it pleas'd God to abrogate and repeal this decree of the *second commandment*, and to declare by his prophets, *with respect to the sin of idolatry*, that the *son* should no longer bear the iniquities of the *father*, but that every man should be rewarded for his own virtue, and punish'd for his own transgression.

Let us now take a short view of the whole decalogue : for this will yet more evidently shew, with what precision and accuracy this threatning, *of visiting the sins of the fathers on the children*, is confin'd to the case alone of idolatry.

The *five last* of the commandments, *Thou shalt not kill*, &c. have no particular condition, no promise or threatning, attach'd to them : being altogether of a moral nature, they did not need any : perjury, robbery,

bery, murder, and the like, are self-evident crimes, which fly in the face, and stare in the conscience of all, who commit them; men, in their rudest estate, could not but see the heinousness of them: the prohibition of these, consequently, wanted no distinct consideration to enforce it. — GOD's bare injunction, here, was enough.

The *first* commandment, *Thou shalt have no other God before me*, is of a different sort, and may be said to be a *positive* law thus far, as it does not expressly and immediately imply, that there is but one GOD, but only, that the LORD was the GOD, whom they ought to serve: to give this commandment weight, and urge it home, a motive was added to it, most fit at that time to influence them. *I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage: therefore, thou shalt have no other God before me.*

The *third*, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*, has no relation, I think, any more to *ordinary*, than *judicial* swearing: only, it having pleased GOD to reveal to this people his great adorable
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of PROVIDENCE. 91

name, he here forbad the making use of that *name*, rashly, and in common, lest by familiarizing themselves to it, they might lose of the respect and veneration, due to him : this too is, partly, a *positive* law ; what, no doubt, a Creator might reasonably require of his creature ; in regard also of the supreme majesty of heaven, in some sense, a moral duty ; yet the reasonableness, and morality of it, being such, as would not instantly, and of it self, appear to them, God thought fit to press obedience to it, by declaring, *he would not hold him guiltless, that should take his name in vain.* This commandment likewise had a view remotely, tho' not so direct as the second, to guard them from idolatry ; in as much as nothing could more tend to give them high and awful sentiments of God, than the making his name so sacred and inviolable, that it should not be even lawful to pronounce it.

As to the *fifth*, *Honour thy father and thy mother*, it is certain, that obedience to our parents, and the shewing them all manner of respect and kindness, is a duty no less plain, than amiable : however, as the practice of it, when it is practis'd, does not so
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much result from affection of nature, as from reason, interest, shame, and other causes; since too the wickedness, and immorality of the contrary, is not so shocking at first sight, as some other wickednesses, or is such at least, as may more easily be dissembled or excused; and as God knew, how apt men would be, tho' plausibly honest in other things, to offend against, and evade this duty, his wisdom saw good eminently to encourage the observance of it, by promising to reward such observance with the most desired of all blessings --- *That thy days may be long in the land.* —

The *fourth* Commandment, *Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy*, being a positive ordinance, has also its particular reason assigned for it. *For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth — and rested the seventh day, wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it.* The example of God himself, is, here, urged to recommend, and to endear his law; a law so gracious, that, in virtue of it, we not only enjoy a respite from toil, and care, once in seven days, but mingle with that enjoyment, gratitude to our Maker, while we act in honour

nour and imitation of him. This, surely, was the wisest, and most indulgent, institution, that could be contrived for man, and has all the marks of love and goodness on it, that can flow from God.

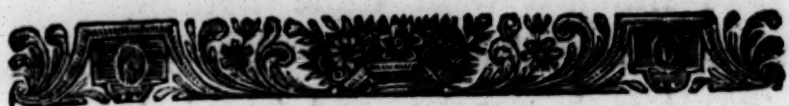
Thus these several commandments, whether absolutely *positive*, or otherwise, have, each of them, their respective conditions, or motives, to enforce them, as the nature and reason of the thing required, and agreeable to the necessity there was for it.

In view to the *second*, this necessity was greater, and it was more important to provide for the observance of it, than of any other ; accordingly, the motive to it was stronger, than to any other : here, the chief danger lay ; here, the guard ought chiefly to be : idolatry was the sin, which human nature, at that time, was most prone to, and which it most behov'd God to secure his people against ; wherefore, in this case, he calls up all their fears, awakes all their passions, declares, he is a God, *jealous of his glory*, and that, if they robb'd him of it, by worshipping idols, and false gods, he would visit that their iniquity from *father to son*.

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Now, the motive or reason, annexed to one command, can no more be extended and applied to all, than the motives or reasons annexed respectively to all, can be alike applied to one : the reason, for instituting the Sabbath, can possibly affect nothing, but the Sabbath, and God's punishing men, through a jealousy of his glory, can relate to nothing, but crimes that deprive him of his glory : to steal, to kill, to forswear one's self, does not, strictly, invade God's rights, or take his honour from him : this only is to be done by the adoration of images, or any created beings.

What has been said, is sufficient to shew, that the threatening of the *second commandment* concerned only the crime, forbid by that commandment : for the rest, the general tenor of God's proceedings with the *Jewish* nation, does, I think, put this quite out of doubt ; there being no instance, as I remember, of any great and durable judgment befalling them, or of any public calamity, that lasted through generations, but what was brought on them, purely on account of their idolatry.



C H A P. IX.

WE have now considered and vindicated the justice and goodness of God in that particular, wherein they seem most liable to be impeached : the stress of his care, and wisdom, lay to guard the *Jews* from idolatry, and in that sense and view only, 'tis now plain, is to be understood the denunciation in the commandment we have been speaking of.

In the same view, it pleased God to continue his wonders long after among this people : hence, the miracle of the Red-sea, repeated at *Jordan* ! the walls of *Jericho* thrown down ! the courses of the planets alter'd ! In this intent, likewise, he order'd them to cut off the seven nations, inhabitants of the promis'd land ; a conduct, which, however dreadful it may at first seem, or in what moving colours soever one might paint it,

it, yet had it not been held, that is, had the *Jews* mingled with those nations, it was more than probable, that they must have gone after their ways, and served their gods, whether one considers the instable state of men's understandings then, or the snares and bewitching persuasions of women, or the power and prevalency of custom and example. But tho' the *Jews* would not probably have been kept from idolatry, if the *Canaanites* had not been destroyed, and they had been planted promiscuously among them; yet this, I trust, would not alone have been a reason with a good God for exterminating so many nations, if it had not coincided with a much better and stronger reason; if those nations had not, in all things, acted in violation of the light of nature and conscience; if they had not enflam'd the sin of idolatry, by adding to it barbarous and impious rites, dreadful to mention; if they had not divested themselves wholly of humanity, giving their children to the flames, and committing all those brutish, incestuous, and unnatural crimes, for which the land is said to have vomited them forth; if, in a word, the measure of their iniquity had not been

been full, till which time it pleas'd God to defer bringing the *Israelites* into their country.

Not only the consideration, therefore, first mention'd, but justice might seem to require their extirpation ; and not only justice, in regard to them, but mercy, in regard to states and kingdoms around them, liable to be corrupted by their ways, and to be led after their example.

It was right then, in every view and respect, that these nations should be cut off : and as to the *Israelites* being made the instruments of it, this could have no tendency, that I see, but to give them the greater horror of those crimes, which were thus chastis'd, and aveng'd by their arm : they knew, they had the command of God, for what they did ; they knew, that these people had been arraign'd and condemn'd, at a tribunal, which cannot err, nor pass an unjust verdict ; and, as it was not unjust in God to command their destruction ; neither was it cruel in his servants to execute that command, any more than it would be to root out out-laws, and robbers, by legal authority.

So far, in reality, was God from enjoining any thing to his people, which might inspire them with furious and sanguinary ha-

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bits and desires, ~~that~~ their whole institution breath'd a quite different spirit : the genius of their laws was good-natur'd throughout ; of which stamp more particularly, were those, relating to *hir'd servants*, to *bondmen*, to *strangers*, to *tributary cities* and people, to the *poor*, to their *cattle* : in all these instances, is seen an abundant goodness and humanity, which, in *some others*, is carried to a yet delicates, and more refin'd pitch : they were not allow'd even to take the *dam* with the *young bird*, or to seeth the *kid* in its *mother's* milk.

Thus was their polity, in many parts of it, calculated, purely, to excite in them kind, and benevolent, desires and affections.

That great *traditionary* law also, deriv'd down from *Noah*, of abstaining from blood, was, in part, reviv'd and enforc'd for the *same good end*, that is, in order to milden their spirits, and to make them humane, and tender of *life* : naturally, men recoil, and are shock'd at the mere sight of blood, which tenderness, of course, would abate and wear off, if they were accustomed to eat it ; the eating that in animals, which is our own proper *life*, and the essence of it, looks like eating our selves ; there is a particular sort
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of barbarity in it, and therefore it must tend to promote barbarous dispositions ; as it has been known, in fact, to do among some savage nations, who have practis'd it : we find too, that all fierce, and noxious, animals live on blood, while the harmless and innocent refrain wholly from it : so that there is, in truth, a connection, in nature, between not eating, and not shedding blood ; between not eating the blood of animals, because 'tis their *life*, and not shedding the blood of man, which is his *life*.

And accordingly, these two commandments, in the law given to *Noah*, are, as it were, grafted into, and made a part of each other. *But flesh, with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall you not eat, and surely, your blood of your lives will I require, &c. viz.* Ye are not to eat that, which is the *life* in animals, that thereby ye may have the greater veneration for *life* it self, and for the *life* of man, which I have guarranteed, and made inviolate.

So careful was God, in forming his infant people, to tincture their minds early with mercy and gentleness, and to give them an aversion to every thing, that had an appearance of cruelty.



C H A P. X.

HAVING, first, set forth and explained the necessity there was of preventing *universal idolatry*, and that this could not so well be done, as by separating a particular people from the rest of mankind, *which was the second branch in the Providential system*; we then proceeded to consider and vindicate the several steps, it pleased God to take, (*from the calling of Abraham to the going out of Ægypt,*) for thus bringing one people to himself, and keeping them from being idolatrous, like the other nations.

We have now also review'd all the subsequent *measures* and precautions, it pleas'd him to use to the same end, and have shewn, in like manner, the perfect wisdom, goodness, and necessity of his various *conduct* herein, *to the time of the extirpation of the Canaanites,*

of PROVIDENCE. 101

Canaanites, and the settling of Israel in that country.

Let us, therefore, briefly, examine what remains : these *methods*, and this *conduct*, had a due and proper effect, however not such, as render'd further interpositions of the divine power needless; the danger of idolatry was not yet over, nor were the *Jews* yet brought to that thorough and unalter'd faith and dependency on God, which was requisite to keep the knowledge of him from being lost : no sooner was the promise to *Abraham* fulfilled, than they start aside; possess'd of the land of *milk and honey*, they forget him, that brought them to it : in a word, they cease not to *provok* GOD to *jealousy*, administring, continually, fresh occasions to his wrath, while they thence become fresh objects of his love and pity : they rebel, and are punished ; repent, and are forgiven ; again rebelling, are again afflicted ; again repenting, are restor'd anew to favour ; their city and temple are laid in ruins ; the same city and temple are rebuilt ; the voice of gladness and triumph now, and now complaining and lamentation, are heard in their streets ; one age sees them in *capti-*

vity; in another, they worship on the *Holy Hill*: and this was the train and process of heaven's dealings with them for divers generations, and till, at length, time and affliction, their own and their father's sad experience, repeated calamities, repeated deliverances, had wrought them to such a sense of their past folly and perverseness, and so thoroughly convinced them of God's supreme power, as well as of his truth and faithfulness, that they were now in no future likelihood of departing from him, and of going after other gods.

But here another evil ensued: tho' they remained faithful to God, they yet perverted his wise and holy intentions in his law, being most diligent and punctual in, and laying all stress on the *showy and less momentous* parts of it, while they neglected the *weighty and substantial*: in vain were the admonitions of *David*, and the prophets. And this, I fear, will be more or less the misfortune of mankind, as long as the world lasts; for by what genius and bent in nature, I know not, or by what *cast* in its original mold, yet so it is, that men are always glad, if they can, to substitute

of PROVIDENCE. 103

stitute something for virtue, which is not virtue, to call that religion, which is not of its kindred, and to sink the regards to real goodness, in the pursuit of its shadows and mimics: excuse them the exercise of humble, meek, and beneficent duties, disturb them not in the gratification of their pride and avarice, and they will be as full of zeal, as you desire, about forms, or about foolish, or useless questions and opinions, whatever costs them nothing, and does not jar with their worldly and hypocritical views and dispositions.

This was too much the temper of the *Jews*, after they were wean'd from idolatry: but this evil, in itself to be lamented, did not yet interfere with the main system of Providence, or lead to the defeating of it; it was enough, in respect of that, that they continued steadfast in the worship of the true God, without danger of warping from it: and in such a spirit they were, and this was the aspect of things among them, for some ages before Christianity, every year and day giving them juster notions of God and his attributes, and strengthening them in their devotion and adherence to him.

In the mean time, the *Pagan* nations had made great openings in wisdom and virtue: those arts, that began in *Greece*, were travelled into other lands: learning had got footing among the illiterate, and humanity and social affections among the barbarous; and many good and useful books were written in *Ethics*, and for the conduct of life: the light of nature was carried high, or rather the darkness of it was much enlighten'd: such was, at length, the state of the *Gentiles*, God having still been pleas'd, from time to time, to send among them persons, uncommonly endowed, for their instruction, and to fit them for the day, when he should more explicitly reveal himself and his sacred will to them. In a word, what with time, and the transmigrating of knowledge from region to region, and the labours of Poets and Philosophers, men, at or about the *Classic æra*, were come, in general, to have tolerably just ideas of virtue and moral truth, and so were in a condition to apprehend and embrace the higher and more important truths of God, and his Providence, and a future state.

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Besides this, the world, after divers changes and revolutions, was, through God's all-ruling wisdom, thrown into that form and complection, that suited with the great alteration design'd : the thousand petty states and tyrannies, whose passions, and whose bigotry, might have run counter to the schemes of Providence, were all swallow'd up in one *great Power*, to whom all appeals lay; and hence no material bar, or obstruction, to the intended settlement of things, could arise but from that one quarter : many parts also of *Europe*, destin'd hereafter to be the chief seat, or emporium of Christianity, and that had, till near this age, lain in utter savageness, were, in some measure, civiliz'd ; the arts and virtues of their conquerors were known to them, and they were growing to a capacity of receiving, at the stated time, the *knowledge*, ordain'd for them from the beginning : so that all things, and circumstances, conspir'd now with the views of heaven, and made this the fit juncture for God to reveal himself to the *Gentiles*, and to put an end to *Idolatry* through the earth.

At the same time, the *Jews* had had a just and sufficient period allow'd them, not only
to

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to take firm rooting in GOD's faith and worship, but to prepare themselves also for the hour of *salvation*, and to know, when he should arrive, the sacred *messenger*, that was promis'd them, by the descriptions given of him, and the various warnings they had to expect him.

Now comes the grand *catastrophe* of the state of our world: the *Jewish ceremonial* law having been instituted merely, as a means to keep them from falling into idolatry, all danger and apprehension whereof was now over, it was right and fitting, on all accounts, to set it aside; and, as the *Pagans*, on the other hand, were about the same time capable, almost universally, of knowing GOD, it was alike fitting to communicate that knowledge to them, that is, to such a part of them, and by such degrees, as should seem meet to divine wisdom; and *this*, as I have said, was the situation, the most auspicious for it, both from the extent of the *Roman* Empire, and that profound peace and tranquillity, that then reign'd through the earth: here, then, was the *fullness* of time! the season for GOD to fulfil his love to his creation: in other words, this was the precisely fit,

of PROVIDENCE. 107

fit, and alone proper juncture for *Messiah* to come, when the *Gentiles* were in a condition to receive, by the *Jews*, the knowledge of God, and when the *Jews* were no longer liable to be corrupted to the idolatry of the *Gentiles*, when the *ritual* law was no further necessary, and when men's minds were ripe for a purer and better *dispensation*, and the circumstances of the world were such, as to favour the success and progress of it.

In this very time *Messiah* came; nor could he have come so opportunely at any other: It would have been utterly inexpedient for him to have come sooner, for the reasons already laid down; and, if he had come later, thousands, who might have heard that inestimable *tiding*, would have died without the consolation of it: in the former supposition, his coming would have been ineffectual; in the latter, it had been equally well for all ages, and periods to come, but not so for some, that would have been past: I do not mention here the accomplishment of the prophecies, that pointed to the *time* of *Messiah's* appearing, and which caused
so

so general an expectation of him at that *time*, because, if any other had been more proper, they might as well have been accommodated to it; but this being eminently the fittest and best *time*, for that reason they were calculated for it.





CHAP. XI.

IT is now manifest, that GOD did not act *arbitrarily* in his revelations, any more than he was *partial* and *unjust* in them: as to *partiality* and *injustice*, these, we have prov'd, cannot be imputed to his conduct, without grossly departing from the true purport and intent of it; *particular* distinctions were never dispens'd by GOD, but for *general* good; and if he shewed love and favour to *this* man, or *this* nation, it was still for the sake of all men, and all nations: he always was, and necessarily is, the guardian and benefactor, alike, of his whole creation: having created *all* for happiness, he must be equally solicitous to procure it for *all*; and should a religion, claiming to come from heaven, imply the contrary, it could not, I think, be receiv'd as such, by any reasonable man.

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If I am ask'd, why it did not please God, to deal with all nations, as he did with the *Jews*, it has been shewn already, that in some respects it would not have been for their good to be so dealt with: then say, all nations being treated like them, and *Messiah* promis'd as particularly to all, that some, or more, of them had, like the *Jews*, rejected him, and been parties to the usage, he met with; would *this* have been a desirable *issue*? Is it to be wish'd, that any one nation should be in the circumstances and condition, which they (the *Jews*) have been in since *Christ*, and in which, for ought we can see, they are like to continue? Lastly, supposing the world to last many thousand years longer, let me ask, what force will then remain to this question, why it pleas'd God for a *punctum*, or moment of time, (for such it may be comparatively to the whole) to treat one nation differently from others, especially since they were thus treated, not merely for their own sakes, nor out of *partial* favour to them, but in order to bring about the welfare of all the rest, which probably could not so well have been done by any other method.

Now,

of PROVIDENCE. III

Now, as God was not *unjust* and *partial* in his revelations, so neither did he act *arbitrarily* in them, or give them at one time, rather than at another, by virtue merely of his sovereign will and pleasure : as often as he reveal'd himself, he did so, strictly and absolutely, for reasons of wisdom and goodness, and at such times only, when it could be done with due effect for men's welfare, and by such means only, as were best suited to procure that effect : the revelation to the *Jews*, was begun to be given, when the world begun to be enough re-peopled ; that to the *Gentiles*, when the *Gentiles* were in a right temper and condition to embrace it : the *former* could not have been dispensed more early, nor the *latter* more seasonably : As soon as the *old* dispensation could be superseded with safety, the *new one* took place, that *new one*, for whose sake alone the *old* was made, and which it was to prepare and make way for : the *one* could be safely repeal'd, and the *other* became practicable at one and the same time : nor *this* was continued, nor *that* deferr'd, any longer, than it was right and fitting, they should be : the same time, and preparation, which was required

quired to fit the *Gentiles* for the knowledge of GOD, was requir'd to preserve and fix that knowledge effectively among the *Jews*, through whom it was to be imparted to them.

That known and boasted objection, then, insisted on by *Porphry*, so often reviv'd by others, falls at length to the ground : It was right on all accounts, that *Messiah* should come so late, that is, that he should come at the time he did, and no other : And as to *whole nations perishing, and innumerable multitudes of men being lost, through ignorance of GOD's will, before his coming*, it might as well be said, that all have been lost and perished, since his coming : what *nations*, what *multitudes* have been thus *lost* ? and who have *perish'd* ? GOD, 'tis certain, provided, according to his great goodness, and as far as it could be done, for the welfare of men in all ages before *Christianity* : his eye was still upon his creation, to bless the good, and prosper their labour : he trained mankind gradually, and by various means, to virtue and knowledge, so to qualify them, at last, for the highest and best knowledge, *that of himself*, and in the mean time, he
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pour'd his love and mercy on them in all shapes: in respect of a *future state* and being, if this be the thing, they, who were before *Christianity*, were in the same circumstance very near with our selves; 'tis true, they did not know clearly that state, and what related to it, as we do; this was not, and could not be reveal'd to them, as it has been to us; nevertheless, there being this future existence, and man's soul being naturally immortal, that existence, and that immortality, must belong as much to those, who lived before *Messiah*, as to those, who came after him; consequently, the blessings and rewards of such a state, are open alike to the one, as to the other: *Christ* did not make *life and immortality*; he only brought them to light: he did not constitute, but only revealed these great and glorious *truths* to men; *truths*, which he was commission'd to reveal to them, and which render'd their being, here, so much more happy and comfortable, than it could have been without such lights and discoveries. *In a word*, the condition of mankind was better'd, and made more perfect, step by step, and as the reason and nature of things directed, and if

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they, that were before *Christ*, wanted the advantages, they were not capable of, and that are deriv'd to us, if they had not the same incentives to virtue and piety, nor the same hopes and promises to support and animate them, if they had less of happiness, as of knowledge, *in this life*, than we have, all just allowances, no doubt, are made them for it *in the next*, and all such retributions, as are due to their state and situation.

There is, indeed, no nonsense in scripture it self; but blockheads and enthusiasts, *this truth cannot be dissembled*, have grafted so plentifully of this stock upon it, that 'tis not always easy to separate what is such, from what is not.*

The *scope and intendment* of the whole scheme of Providence, was to bring human

* There are a set of writers, of great and long standing, who impute the infidelity of these times to pluralities in church-preferments, non-residence, supineness and ill lives of clergymen, and many things of that sort: I cannot come, all at once, into such opinions; but this, I think, may be affirmed with good probability, that if *revelation* were stript of all its abuses, from first to last, and were propounded fairly, and in its *original* plainness and *honesty*, it would have much fewer opposers, and stand fair for being receiv'd by reasonable and virtuous men.

nature, by degrees, to all the beauty, holiness, and perfection, it could, *in this state*, admit of, and all the parts of this scheme, as, I hope, I have made appear, were wisely form'd, and pursued, depending regularly on each other, and leading to the same *great and good end*: every measure was rightly tim'd, and necessary in it self, and adapted to occasions, and the respective circumstances, and condition, of mankind.

If it could be prov'd, as has been before hinted, that God had acted *arbitrarily*, and capriciously, in his dealings with men, and by no rule, but *pleasure*, this were proving, that he acts without wisdom, or design, or goodness, and were, in effect, to cancel his *attributes*, and divest him of his *nature*: 'tis the same thing to deny God's existence, as to say, he does *this*, or *that*, merely because he wills it: he can do, nor will nothing, but because 'tis wise and good; and when you suppose him to do otherwise, you suppose him to cease to be what he is, that is, to be an *infinitely wise and good* being.

'Tis true, we may not be able, absolutely and in all cases, to trace the reasons of the

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divine conduct, and to demonstrate the wisdom of it; but when, in its *general* process, and tenor, we find all possible marks of excellency and perfection, we may reasonably conclude, that every *particular* is wise also, whether we immediately see the fitness of it, or no.

If you suppose any *particular*, or circumstance, as reveal'd from heaven, to be defective in wisdom, or goodness, *this*, in truth, is supposing it not to be reveal'd; 'tis denying the revelation, because no such defects can possibly be in God: all the *historical* evidence in the world, and the strongest proofs of facts, from *testimony*, will prove nothing, if those facts are not worthy of the Being, they presume to come from, and if they are not agreeable to his known, immutable nature and attributes: we find, in his visible *material* world, the highest characteristics of wisdom and goodness; much more may we expect to find them in his *moral* dispensations; if the *former* are infinitely expressive of the perfections of their great Author, the *latter*, certainly, cannot fall short of them in that regard.

Secondly,

Secondly, it is no less weak and absurd to affirm, that we cannot decide, as not having competent talents for it, concerning the measures, and *proceedings*, of GOD: if so, we cannot be sure, what are his *proceedings*, nor know, if things really come from him, or not. It is indeed finely and justly said in scripture, that *his paths are unsearchable*, and the like; that is, we cannot discover thoroughly all the secrets, and properties, of nature, nor investigate successfully all causes in their effects; yet do we clearly apprehend the eternal differences of good and evil, and the grounds of moral truth and rectitude; we are fully acquainted with the high attributes of the Creator, and can distinguish what is, or is not consentaneous thereto: it is again said, that *his thoughts are not, as our thoughts*, that is, the *wisdom* of GOD is as much greater than ours, as infinite is more than finite; yet have we capacity to adore and praise that *wisdom*, and to judge, whether a *revelation* be worthy of it; if we had not, we should not be worthy of a *revelation*, nor fit subjects for one.



C H A P. XII.

I Think it proper to consider a little further the aforementioned objection of *Porphyry*: I should be glad, if I could, to lay the ax to the root of this evil, which, I imagine, is built on a supposition, not only groundless in it self, but most unworthy of God; the supposition, that all, who liv'd before *Christ*, whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*, are perish'd, or in a state of *damnation*, by their being incapable, on that account, of any benefit from his *merits*.

In respect of *Christ's merits, redemption, and satisfaction for sin*, these are, in reality, a set of phrases, or notions, which have usurp'd a meaning, that, I hope, does not belong to them, or which, at least, are not to be met with, that I know of, in the *gospel* histories, and which our *Saviour* himself does not any where make use of,

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of, nor allude to : 'tis true, the *Apostles*, sometimes, make mention of *attonement* and *expiation* ; but these expressions, when used by them, are either a *typical* way of speaking and description, and in allusion to the rites of the *Mosaic* institution, or else are urged by them in their reasonings and debates, with *Jews*, as fit arguments to them, and refer often to certain dark questions and opinions, which we cannot, perhaps, come to a very exact knowledge of.

The *Apostles*, no doubt, were persons highly favour'd of God, and so far under the guidance of his divine Spirit, as was necessary to enable them to execute their great trust, which was, to inform mankind of the truth of those wondrous facts, the *resurrection* and *ascension* ; in other words, *to preach Christ, and him crucified* : notwithstanding, they do not seem to insist on all they say, as *absolutely* inspir'd, and on some occasions, they actually disclaim inspiration : their several discourses, and epistles, ought, certainly, to be held in the highest respect and veneration, and deserve men's most serious study and attention, but when we are desirous to know the true intent and

view of *Christianity*, and the real will and declarations of God, we ought, surely, to resort to the lessons of *Christ* himself: and yet the contrary method is almost always taken; men still seem to value more the dictates of his disciples, than those of our *Saviour*, and for one quotation, or proof, they fetch from these, we have a great many from *St. Paul*, and the rest: *this is*, in appearance, laying greater stress on those writings, which are often exceeding obscure, and intricate, for the reasons just mention'd, than on the clear distinct instructions of the *Author of our faith*: a great part of *Christians* even carry this mistake (for such, I think, I may call it) yet further, preferring, *first*, the discourses of the *Apostles* to those of their *Master*; then, the writings and opinions of the *Fathers* to those of the *Apostles*; and lastly, the judgment and decisions of the modern *Church*, to the decisions of both the other: thus, the lower they go, and the more distant from inspiration, the greater with them is the authority; which certainly cannot be a very right way of proceeding.

To return then, these notions of *Christ's merits, satisfaction for sin*, and the like, are
not,

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not, as I said, to be found in the *Evangelists*; our *Saviour* nowhere describes himself in the lights and views, which such phrases import: the *commission*, in truth, given by God to our glorious Lord, *Messiah*, was of a quite different nature: the intent of it, was not, I humbly apprehend, to expiate past transgressions so much, as to provide against future ones; was not to satisfy for *imaginary* guilt, but to conduct men to *real* virtues; nor to cleanse them from the sins of others, but to assure them of pardon, on repentance for their own.

But, principally, and above all things, the drift of *Christ's* mission was, to bring mankind to a perfect knowledge of the true God, and of the *absolute unity* of his nature; *this* was his main scope; accordingly, 'tis always his care to guard against errors and misapprehensions in *this grand point*, and to prevent, if possibly it could be done, all confusion and perplexity of ideas about it; and hence it is, that we always find him speaking of himself in the meekest and most humble terms: he will not even permit them to call him *good*, for that none, except God, could be said, properly and perfectly, to be so:

so: at taking leave of his *disciples*, he tells them, *I go to my Father and your Father, to my GOD and your GOD*, and when he is question'd concerning the day of judgment, his answer is, *that of that day and hour no man knoweth, not even the angels, that are in heaven, no, not the Son himself, but his Father only.*

For this reason likewise, I conceive it is, that our *Lord* so frequently styles himself the *Son of man*: at the same, time, he is, most properly, and in a superlative manner, the *Son of GOD*. *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; this day I have begotten him*, that is, this is the *sacred Person*, so eminently favour'd and lov'd by me, and *this day* he enters on his sublime illustrious office of *Christ Messiah*, Lord and Judge of this world; this, I believe, is the true meaning of the words, and that any other will be found inconsistent: if we suppose them to relate to eternity, or to the time of the *Virgin's* conceiving by the *Holy Ghost*, both the one, and the other, implies a contradiction; but, if the passage be understood, as I have explained it, it is, I will dare to say, the finest instance of figurative speech, that can be

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be conceiv'd, and the most admirably expressive of, and suited to the majesty of the thing, it represents.

Thus is *Christ*, the *Son of GOD*, in a sense more excellent far, than any other of the *angels of GOD*, who are also often call'd in Scripture the *sons of GOD*; but for fear, lest men, from this great title, or through misguided zeal or gratitude, should ascribe too much to him, and so injure God, he chooses, on almost all occasions, to call himself the *Son of man*, as some of the *Prophets* had done before. *And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.* Here, you observe, he assumes this title, in the most solemn, and most august exertion of his character; and, 'tis in truth, of all his stiles, or appellations, the most splendid, as it signifies, and delineates, to us, the nature and high quality of his amiable office and person.

All, or many of the angels of heaven, have, it may be, in their proper degrees and subordinations, vice-royalties, or the care of particular empires, or worlds, committed to them; *that* of this globe was assign'd to the *Christ*: wherefore, he is called emphatically
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the *Son of man*; call'd so, not merely because he took *human nature* upon him, but as a peculiar distinction and honour, and to point him out, and exalt him, among the rest of the *sons of GOD*, who, probably, had particular titles also, taken from their respective charges, or governments: thus the *angel*, charged with the affairs of *Perfia*, if I remember, is stil'd the *Prince of the kingdom of Persia*.

This most blessed of all persons, the holy *Jesus*, may, I do acknowledge, be very justly said to have taken away the sins of the world; he was the *light of the world*, and GOD's instrument in bringing men to the practice of true religion and holiness: he may, in a very worthy acceptation, be termed a *Saviour* and *Redeemer*, as having put men into the way of being reconciled to GOD, and not to have their sins imputed to them, and having so much bettered the condition of human life, by adding the highest privileges and comforts to it: so that these things may, under caution, be construed into some very good and pious *meaning*, tho' they cannot, I fear, be admitted, wholly and absolutely,
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in that *meaning*, in which they have been commonly taken and understood.

However, that I may attack the objection before us, in all its quarters, it shall be supposed for once, that there are grounds in scripture, for this doctrine of *merits and satisfaction*, in the vulgar apprehension of it: admitting this, yet how is it to be inferred from it, that all are *perish'd* that were before *Messiah*? *Whoever believeth in me, it is said, shall be saved, and whoever believeth not, shall be damned.* This declaration, I am inclin'd to think, concerns chiefly, or only, those, who were eye-witnesses of the works of *Jesus* and his *Apostles*; not all those, I hope, who came to the knowledge of them only by *tradition*, and who cannot be induced to think the relations, we have of them, *authentic*, but most certainly not those who never heard, and have never had opportunity of hearing of the name of *Christ*.

But be this as it will; yet how, I say, is it to be inferred from hence, that all before our *Saviour* are lost? Why thus, I presume: believing in *Christ* being the only thing that entitles men to salvation, they
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who lived before him, as they could not possibly believe on him, whom they knew not, so could not be sharers in his *merits*: now, the contrary to all this, I think most evident; for, as no one can believe, what he has never heard any mention of, the not believing in the text cannot be extended to any, to whom *Christ* was never preached: it is not therefore fair to make such an inference, as in the objection, from these words, since they are capable of a different meaning, and are only an abstract of *Christ's* discourse to his *Apostles*, and, like all other passages in the gospel, ought to be interpreted from the whole tenor of it. As the *former* part of the verse supposes *Christ* to be preach'd, and believ'd and obey'd, and tells the consequence of such belief and obedience; so the *latter* part supposes *Christ* to be preach'd, and not believ'd, or rejected, and the consequence of that in like manner: What relation has this to nations, or people, that liv'd before *Christ* was born? Or why must an absurd sense be put upon words, that are capable of a good one, unless it be to make the scriptures appear ridiculous?

What

What would a sensible *Chinese*, or other *Pagan*, say, if he were told, that God, the all-good and righteous God, had *damn'd*, had consign'd to eternal misery, unnumber'd nations and empires, millions on millions of men, for the transgression of *another*, and for crimes, which, through the necessary corruption of their nature, they could not avoid; that he had *damn'd* the whole race of mankind, for the first four thousand years of the world, only because they were so unfortunate, as to be born within that period! It is not, I presume, the determin'd opinion of thinking *Christians*, that all, who liv'd before *Christ*, are perish'd; but 'tis a moot or doubtful point with some of the weaker part of them, who seem only to wish kindly, and to speak good-natur'dly in the affair; their real judgment, their fears at least, are on the side of *damnation*: if it were not so, how came it, that a true answer has not been, commonly, given to this *objection*, this demand of *Porphyry*, *For what reason a merciful GOD could for so many ages, from Adam to Moses, and from Moses to Christ, suffer whole nations to perish, through ignorance of his will and law; and why it*
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was necessary for Christ to come so late, and not before an innumerable multitude of men had been lost? I am surprised, that it has not been constantly, throughout so many centuries, replied to him, that the fact, or notion, on which his objection is grounded, has no foundation in our religion.

The sufferings, and *Passion* of Christ, and his propitiation for sin, and his being a sacrifice, acceptable to God, are plainly allusions to the effects, which sacrifices had in the Jewish law; not to every effect, but to some particular and eminent ones: and, as those, who did eat at God's table, that is, partook of his sacrifices, were deem'd friends of God; so because we are reconcil'd to God, or made friends to him, by the death of Christ, he is look'd upon as a sacrifice: but whatever is intended by such figurative expressions, one thing is certain, that 'tis no where suggested, that the good and faithful endeavours of those, who liv'd before Christ, were unacceptable to God, because they knew nothing of Christ.

To conclude, I hope, I shall not be thought to have had any design, in what has been said, to derogate from the character
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or person of our blessed *Saviour*: all I contend for, and thus much, surely, should be granted, is, that such notions, as manifestly impugn the justice and goodness of God, however they may have got admittance into some weak men's heads, or may be countenanc'd from mistaken and misunderstood passages of the sacred writings, yet if they are not plainly found there, and this agreeably to the whole tenor of the scriptures, they ought to be disown'd and discarded. *Deism*, I am satisfied, will not fare the better for this, nor *Christianity* the worse.





CONCLUSION.

SO far as I have gone, namely, to the birth of *Messiah*, the wisdom and goodness of God appear, as I conceive, unexceptionable *in the main of things*: and I am willing to hope, that some of *those*, who interest themselves against *reveal'd* religion, will be induc'd to consider, candidly, what has been advanced: I need not say, I mean here only the rational and virtuous part of *deists*; *those* of them, that are known for learning, ability, and moderation: for *such*, it is certain, there have been, and are, let little *wits* compliment them ever so much with their own title, or great *casuists* dispose of them ever so unfortunately.

I take this opportunity, also, to congratulate these *gentlemen*, on the good effects of their endeavours, no doubt undesign'd by them, and to return them my most humble thanks for the service which, I think, they have done to the cause of God, and *Christianity*: there is nothing, I am persuaded, which

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which so much aids, and promotes, the interests of *true religion*, as a free and unreserv'd enquiry into it ; 'tis this, which opens the *foundations* of truth, and shews their depth and strength : when men of *learning* distrust, and dispute, the grounds of *religion*, men of *learning* likewise assert, and vindicate it : thus, *wit*, and *genius*, are put to a stretch, and have a new edge given them ; and hence *labours* are produced, that, without this spur, would not have seen the light ; monuments of *antiquity*, also, that had been lost, and *tracts* of *curious* knowledge, that were worn out, are by this means recover'd ; new *veins* of reasoning are often struck out, and *solutions* found for difficulties, that would not else have been found, and divers matters clear'd up and explain'd, that, probably, otherwise would have remain'd in the dark.

Such service has, and, I hope, always will be done to *revelation* by a *fair* and *candid* *opposition* to it, for no other is justified by me ; nor will any *defences* of it, I will dare say, avail much, but what are *fair* and *candid* also : men of sense, and knowledge, will not be bluster'd, and ill-treated, into a belief of what (tho' mistaken) they judge, there is not

sufficient evidence for; they will not be *intimidated* into conviction, nor yield assent to any syllogisms of *that kind*: to tell them of the great danger *infidelity*, and the criminal, or *damnable*, nature of it, is only to furnish them with a new and better argument in its vindication, than they had, perhaps, before: for how, I would fain know, can *infidelity* be *criminal*? it may be *unreasonable*: it is so in *my* judgment, and in *yours*: but does it follow, that it must be so in the judgment of all men? must that, which appears unreasonable to me, *necessarily* appear so to every other person? are not the wisest men, in some things, liable to error? or will you pronounce a man *guilty*, for standing in a mistaken notion, when he thinks, it is not a mistaken one? is it wicked to *think*, and *examine*, and to profess those opinions, that are the true result of such *thinking*? is it *criminal* to rest upon, and to be determin'd by our best reason, and understanding? by this rule, it may be *criminal* to see, or hear, or taste, or any thing: 'tis such foolish and absurd pretences as *these*, that *sometimes* make men *infidels*, and *oftener* confirm them in being so: all, that a *wise* and *good* God

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can demand, and expect, from *rational* creatures, is to make the best and sincerest enquires, they are able, after truth, and to maintain and adhere to it, when they think they have found it; to desire, and to study, to know his *will*, and to obey what, after due search, they conclude to be such.

It is indeed ridiculous and stupid, in all views, to go about to frighten people into our own opinion; if they are *wise* men, they can only be reason'd into it; if they are *fools*, that trouble is not necessary: let things be propos'd, and debated, with the temper and decency, they ought to be, let no one assert what he does not truly think, nor urge for argument, what does not appear conclusive to himself, and one may reasonably hope, that the controversy will issue well; it cannot be otherwise; for, if the deniers of *revelation* are in the right, they ought to prevail; if they are in the wrong, they cannot: it has been always understood, I take it, as promis'd to the *church*, that the *gates of hell shall never prevail against it*; what need then of the *secular* arm? what occasion for *terrors* of any sort? what even for the least degree of *anger*, or *resentment*?

To return to what I was first saying, the
knowing

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knowing and serious part of *unbelievers* will, I am in hopes, regard with ingenuouſneſs, and good nature, what has been ſaid by me in theſe pages, or what ſhall be ſaid, alike inoffenſively, by any other: ſuch men, I preſume, are above taking unjuſt, and unhandſome, advantages; they will not deſire to evade *truth* by *ſophiſtry*; nor will they except to, and cavil at little *overſights* and *miſtakes*. — From theſe, therefore, one may juſtly expect to have a fair hearing.

As to the reſt, the rabble of *freethinkers*, I paſs them by with all the charity, and contempt, that can be in man's heart: it is, indeed, only for civility ſake, that I have mention'd them at all; for, ſtrictly ſpeaking, they are not of this *number*, or party: they are *libertines*, *fanatics*, *pedlars*, any thing you pleaſe; but not, in propriety, *deiſts*: they paſs, I acknowledge, for *ſuch*, and are greatly admir'd on that account; their want of *faith*, or ſeeming to want it, is their proper praiſe and recommendation; nor is there any kind of *accompliſhment*, perhaps, in greater requeſt at preſent, than *this*: 'tis made the *mode*, and *breeding*, of refin'd life, and is got even among that *ſex*, whom
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one can neither convince by *reason*, nor reprove without *ill-manners*: all ranks go into this affectation: a fine gentleman, *to be thought such*, must have a tincture of *scepticism*; *fops* are fond of it, as if it were a part of dress, and *courtiers* mistake it for the *Belles Lettres*: notwithstanding, this species of *wits* cannot, I think, with justice be marshall'd among *infidels*: there goes sense, and pains, and learning to the making, what we truly call a *freethinker*: what right have people to that name, who have neither sense, nor learning! such persons, certainly, ought to keep to the *track*, and to the *community*, they were brought up in; if their fathers were *churchmen*, they ought to be *churchmen*; if their fathers were *Muggletonians*, it behoves them also to be *Muggletonians*.

Believing, I will allow, is, very generally, an infirmity; 'tis the property of weak and ignorant minds, and what they take vast pleasure in: yet this is not *irregular*, not *out of character*; it is not *unnatural*, as it is to set up to be *deists* without *deism*, and *freethinkers* without *thought*: a person may be excused, who has no reason of his *faith*, but 'tis utterly unfair in men to have no reason for their *infidelity*. This

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This is not, as I said, being, in reality, *infidels*; 'tis only seeming to be what they are not, and priding in *imaginary* wickedness, made *real* in them, because they have no pretensions to it.

Let these persons glory in their *crime*, and folly, for such it *truly* is in them; let them enjoy the vanity of *infidelity*, and the dear-bought applauses, they may meet with from weak and wicked men: as I do not envy such *philosophers*, I have no intentions to disturb them: it is to men of virtue and knowledge only, that I direct myself, and I shall be glad of the approbation of any such, whether they are found among the *believing*, or *infidel* part of mankind: in the meantime, 'twill always be a satisfaction to me to reflect, that I have contributed, what was in my humble power, to the support, or explanation, of *truths*, (esteem'd such by me) the right understanding of which I judge essential to men's welfare, and what it most of all things concerns them to be truly inform'd about.

F I N I S.

